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# LOVE SHORT STORIES

POPULAR PUBLICATIONS

SEPT.

## Forget IF YOU CAN

by DOROTHY BRADLEY

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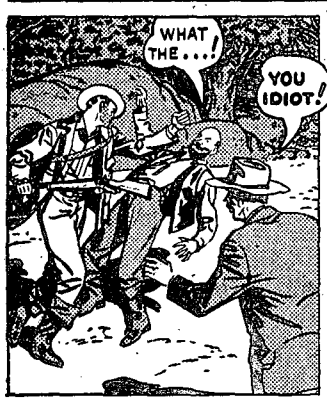

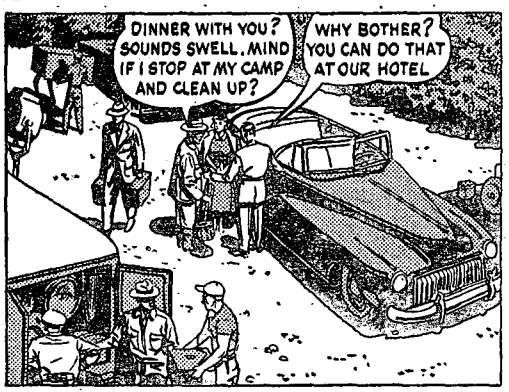

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# LOVE SHORT STORIES

Vol. 34, No. 2 September, 1951

## Stories

***FORGET—IF YOU CAN*** ..... ***Dorothy Bradley*** ***10***
Should a girl believe in the man she loves—even if the facts prove him faithless?

***HOLIDAY'S END*** ..... ***Helen Lathrop*** ***30***
. . . would it mean the end—or the beginning—of love for Jocelyn?

***BACKDOOR TO PARADISE*** ..... ***Jane Blake*** ***46***
Young love—more than anything—has the power to prove the old adage that "every cloud has a silver lining".

***SAY IT SWEET*** ..... ***Susan Wood*** ***52***
. . . when you tell a girl you love her—even if you don't mean it!

***ASK ME NO QUESTIONS*** ..... ***Helen Ahern*** ***68***
Linda didn't know that Nigel was being paid to kiss her!
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***A MERRY CHASE*** ..... ***Mary Catellier*** ***88***
. . . is not the best exercise for a heart that wants to settle down to love.

***HIS SOMETIME LOVE*** ..... ***Marianne Barrett*** ***98***
Love can make a man great—or it can ruin him.
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## Verse

***PROPOSAL*** ..... ***Catherine E. Berry*** ***51***
***CHECKMATED*** ..... ***Gladys Martin*** ***51***
***TO NO AVAIL*** ..... ***Pauline Booker*** ***57***

## Features

***PEN PALS*** ..... ***Dora Dean, Hostess*** ***6***
***LOVES THAT LIVE FOREVER*** ..... ***Everett H. Ortner*** ***65***
***FOUR PAGES OF PATTERNS*** ..... ***84***

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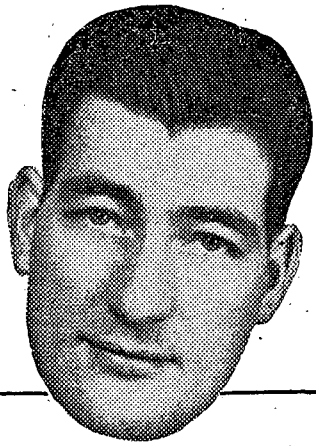

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Notify Dora Dean at once of any change in address, giving your number, old and new address.

**L-4407** NEEDS FRIENDS

I am a very lonely girl who lives on a farm and has no friends because there are no boys or girls my age around here. Am five feet four, have brown hair. I play guitar and like cowboy songs. Would like to hear from pen pals my age, which is fifteen.

Pat

**L-4408** VETERAN

Here is a World War II veteran who served in Africa, Sicily and Italy. I am six feet tall, have brown hair and blue eyes. Like fishing, hunting, good books, movies, dancing, etc. Would like to secure pen pals the world over and will answer all.

Lowry

**L-4409** YANKEE

This nineteen year old girl is five feet four, has dark eyes and hair. I would like to correspond with pen pals, boys and girls, my own age. I am interested in popular music and in all kinds of sports. I promise to answer all who write.

Babs

**L-4410** SIX FEET TALL

An ex-cow poke now in the Army is interested in hearing from you girls. I am twenty, six feet tall, have dark hair. I love all sports and will answer all letters. Right now am stationed in Alaska and it is pretty lonesome.

Stitch

**L-4411** BLONDE

A nineteen year old girl with blonde hair, five feet five inches tall, would like to hear from boys who are tall. I like dancing and games of all kinds. I am lonely

*(Please turn to page 8)*



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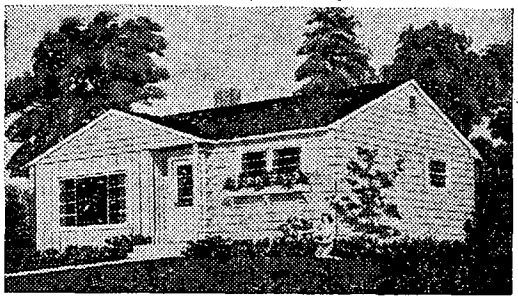

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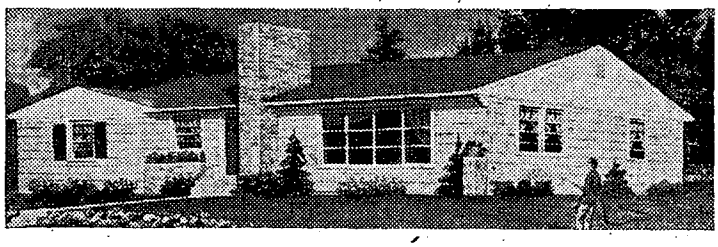

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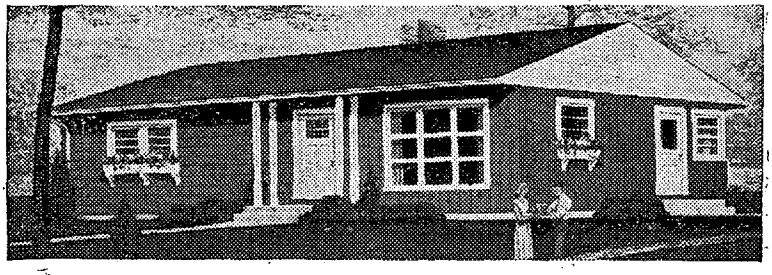

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(Continued from page 6)

and would like to hear from you fellows. Will exchange snapshots.

Sue

**L-4412** SOLDIER

I am twenty-six, five feet eight and a half, dark eyed, and black haired. I am in the Army in Alaska and it is very lonely up here, there is no place to go and I have been away from home over two years. I am a truck driver. Will send snapshots to anyone.

Johnny

**L-4413** BASHFUL

This fourteen year old girl's favorite pastimes are basketball, skating, writing letters, hiking, movies and swimming. I am five feet two, have blonde hair, very curly, and I have brown eyes. I am sort of bashful and shy and would like to hear from boys and girls any age.

Norma

**L-4414** AWAY FROM HOME

This thirty-three year old fellow, six feet tall, is a veteran of World War II. My hobbies are sports, such as bowling, swimming and baseball. I like to write letters and would like to hear from girls all over the U. S. Will answer all and try to make them interesting.

Al

**L-4415** SHE KNITS

Here is a girl seventeen years of age. I have short black hair and big blue eyes. I am five feet three and a half inches tall and am a senior in high school. I like water skiing, movies, dancing, knitting argyles. Would like to hear from boys and girls, boys mostly.

Junie

**L-4416** LONELY MAN

I'm a lonely man of twenty-five, looking for the right girl. Am five feet four, have blue eyes and brown hair, am a little handicapped. I like reading, movies, playing music and sports. I'm a Catholic, live in Canada. Would like to exchange snapshots.

Curly

**L-4417** COLLECTS AUTOGRAPHS

A fifteen year old girl, five feet six, blonde, would like letters from boys and girls her age. I enjoy writing and receiving letters, reading, movies, swimming, tennis, dancing, fun. I collect autographed movie photos. Would like mail from foreign countries too.

Nan

**L-4418** CLASSICAL MISS

I am a nineteen year old girl, love to dance, collect classical recordings. I have brown hair, hazel eyes. Would like to hear from young people about my age and older. How about it pen pals, will any of you answer my plea?

Bobbye

**L-4419** FROM ALASKA

Calling all girls with long hair. I'd like to write girls from eighteen to twenty-five. I am a twenty-five year old soldier. Am five feet six. I sing and play most all string instruments. Love to dance and have fun, will answer all letters.

Curly

**L-4420** YOUNGSTER

I am thirteen years old, am five feet four, have blonde hair. I love music and reading. My favorite sports are skating, swimming, dancing, horseback riding. I would like to have pen pals anywhere from thirteen on up. I will exchange snapshots gladly.

Toot

**L-4421** ACCORDIONIST

This eighteen year old boy, six feet three, likes all types of sports, dancing, driving and movies. I work for the railroad by day and play my piano accordion in the evenings. I would like to correspond

(Please turn to page 111)

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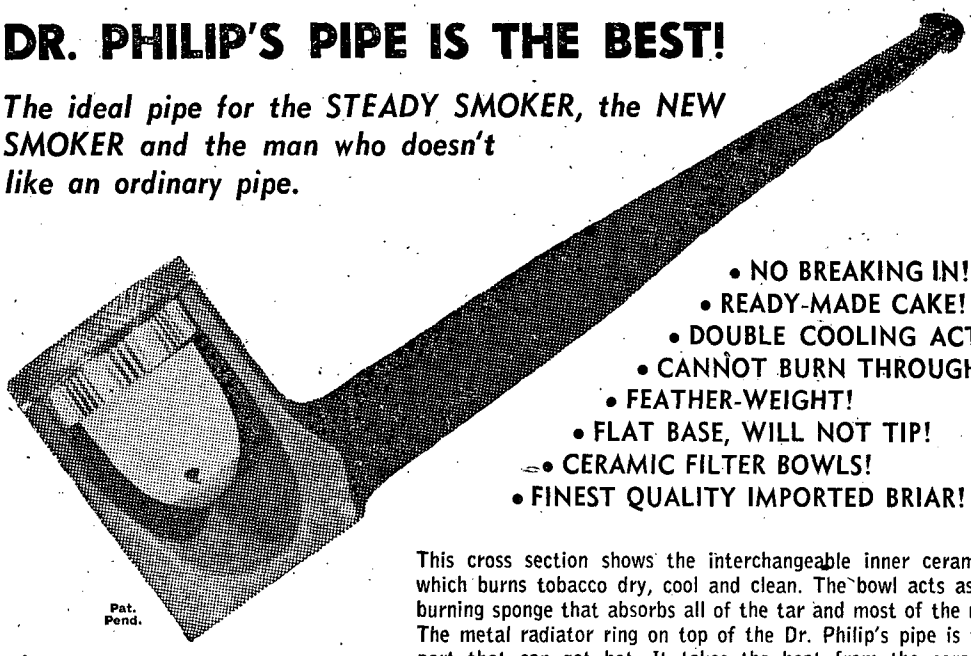


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9-51

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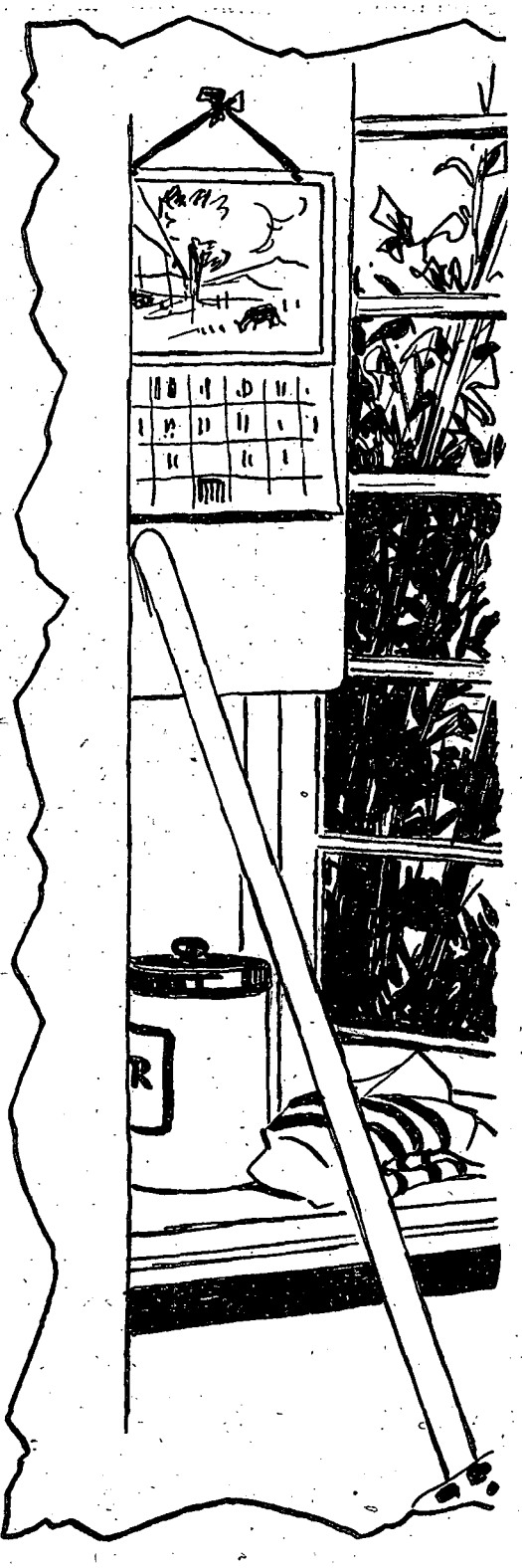
# Forget—If You Can

By DOROTHY BRADLEY

**. . . the wonderful glow of love —and the terrible ache that its loss brings.**



THERE WAS nothing significant about Anne Winthrop's vital statistics. Light brown hair, brown eyes, height, five four and a half. Pretty, people said, a nice girl, but so were lots of American girls. The significant thing was that she was Peter Winthrop's daughter. As such, she lived in an expensively sprawling rambler on a hill, wore Paris originals, and was completely unhappy.

She had only admitted that unhappiness to herself this morning. She had been sitting at her vanity, brushing her hair, and unhappiness had looked back at her from the brown eyes in the mirror. It was showing, finally, after being buried for years under the spell of a vicarious fame, her



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*"You wanted me for what you thought would be position and money," she said bitterly.*



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own sensible gratitude for her material possessions, and the comfort of her mother's love. She had little patience with unhappiness in anyone, least of all, herself, and she started instantly to plan a course of action. A trip abroad, a course in business school, perhaps. A quick sharp knock on her bedroom door cut into the plans.

"Anne."

"Come in, Father." Her shoulders rose, straight and stiff.

The door opened a little, and her father's young looking face appeared around the edge. "Some people are dropping in tonight. Around nine. Take care of the arrangements, will you?"

"How many?" she asked automatically.

"Fifteen or so. Maybe twenty," he said vaguely. "And leave word with Bryan that I'll be in my study and am not to be disturbed before dinner."

She nodded. "I . . ." She hesitated. "I wanted to talk with you about something."

One hand flashed into view as he looked, frowning, at his watch. "Was it important?"

To her, yes. To him it would be a whim, a trivial thing. Her eyes dropped to the polished top of the vanity. "No. It can wait."

She spent the day doing the things he expected her to do. She gave Bryan, who was a combination butler and man-of-all-work, her father's message. She conferred with the cook, Leila, about canapes; she marketed personally; she checked the supplies of Scotch and Bourbon and brought in great armfuls of late chrysanthemums and arranged them in all the rooms. And as she worked, the unhappiness in her mixed with resentment. This would be the last time, she told herself firmly. She was sick of her father's countless little parties and of the clever people who came, sick of the role of hostess that had been hers since the death of her mother two years ago. And most of all, she was sick of being Peter Winthrop's daughter, a name, a face, a shadow of a personality. The pattern of meeting people had been the same for so long. They always took a quick second look at her after hearing her name. "Oh, is that her father—Peter Winthrop, the playwright?" Then they waited to hear her talk, as though expecting the same sparkle of satire that characterized her father's plays. She hoped the crowd who was coming tonight would be familiar. At least they wouldn't expect more of her than she could give.

PETER was always a perfect host. He greeted each guest warmly, his bright smile flashing as though his or her arrival was all he had been waiting for. Anne stood beside him, keeping a pleasant smile on her lips and feeling the familiar sense of strain creeping over her. They came from all walks of life, Peter's friends, but each had some special talent or niche in life. Each had something to contribute to a gathering, and the party got swiftly under way, the clink of glasses and women's laughter intermingled with the conversation that flashed rapier-quick and bright from the philosophy of Nietzsche to Mayan architecture and back to the newest trend in art. There was one single man, Conrad Laughlin, whom Anne knew her father had invited for her benefit. He was a complacent, self-satisfied young man who owned a racing stable and was openly bored with any conversation that didn't pertain either to horses or Conrad Laughlin. Anne had gone out with him, but she did not feel the faintest stirring of romance, although he had made it clear that his interest in her would deepen if she would unbend a bit.

Dr. and Mrs. Bentley came last, and Anne did not have to pretend to be glad to see them. Besides being their family physician, Dr. Bentley had been one of Peter's closest friends as long as Anne could remember. They had not come alone. A tall young man was standing with them.

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"This is Dr. Kenneth Wylie, Peter," Dr Bentley said. "My newest protegé. I knew you wouldn't mind if we brought him along."

Peter welcomed the newcomer cordially, and Dr. Bentley turned belatedly to introduce Anne. He always seemed to forget that she had grown up, but she liked him well enough to forgive him for that. "And this is Anne."

"How do you do, Anne?" Kenneth Wylie said.

She did not know, then, or later, whether he was actually handsome. She was conscious of a wide joyful looking smile and the nicest eyes she had ever seen.

"Hello," she said.

She kept standing there, looking at him, until she suddenly recalled herself and broke her eyes away. With a conscious effort, she resumed her duties as hostess, moving from one guest to another, making sure that Bryan replenished the glasses and the trays of canapes. But from the moment of their meeting, she remained acutely aware of the presence of this new young man. She talked to him a little, as she did everyone else, but it was fleeting and unsatisfying. Finally, when she had stopped in the hall to lightly rearrange a bouquet of flowers, he came up to her.

"Those are beautiful chrysanthemums," he said.

"Thank you. They're out of the garden."

"This late?" he asked surprised. "I should think it would be too cold."

"Not for my chrysanthemums. I'm quite proud of them. The garden is my hobby." She said on an impulse, "Would you like to see it?"

"Very much."

SHE LED HIM through the dining room and out French doors onto the terrace. She had come without a wrap, but she was unconscious of the chill in the air.

"We won't be able to see all of it," she told him, "but there's enough light from the house to make out part of it."

She walked ahead of him on the little pebbled path that curved between the flower beds, explaining the varieties and pointing them out. And all at once she became conscious that he was looking at her, not at the garden. She turned and faced him questioningly.

"I'm not really interested in the flowers," he said candidly. "I owe you a debt of gratitude for bringing me out here."

"Why?"

She could see the quick grin that flashed on his face in the shadowy light. "I'll be frank with you—and let the chips fall where they may. I'm way out of my depth—in there." He indicated with a little motion of his hand the yellow square of light that was the picture window. "I'm just a doctor, a plain bread-and-butter variety of doctor. It took a while to achieve even that. There wasn't any time left over to learn much of anything else. I can talk medicine, if the occasion warrants, of course. Otherwise, my brand of conversation deals with subjects that are—unaesthetic in the extreme." Again the grin, his eyebrows raised a little questioningly as though he awaited her reaction.

Anne smiled. "Like what?"

He shrugged. "Oh, who saw what movie last week. The relative merits of mushrooms and onions when allied with steak. Reminiscing about the hell we raised in high school."

"That sounds wonderful." The glow inside her spilled over into her voice. "Will you talk to me about those things sometime?"

"It's a date. If that's what you want."

"That's what I want." She said impulsively, "I owe you a thank you, too."

"What for?"

"For not saying 'So you're Peter Winthrop's daughter' in that curious tone people use. I always wonder if I'm expected to stand on my hands or display an extra

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pair of ears. For not asking if I'm a writer, too." She said it lightly, without the bitterness that would have been there if she had said it to herself.

He looked at her soberly, nodding. "A famous father. It's a lot to live up to, isn't it?"

"It would be," she said, "if I did. I stopped trying years ago. I'm plain Anne Winthrop who struggled through school on a C average without a single, solitary talent." She smiled up at him.

He did not return the smile. His eyes on her face were thoughtful, searching. "You're not plain," he told her. "I think you're special."

Her smile faded as her gaze became fixed in the depths of his. They stood without touching and without moving. Anne's breath came fast and deep as she stood lost in the grip of a force that was closer and more powerful than physical contact.

His voice, when he broke the strange spell, was husky.

"When can I see you?"

"Any time," she said, without coyness. "Tomorrow. Soon."

He reached for her hand. "We'd better get back. Or do you think we'll be missed?"

"I doubt it." She laughed. "But I am supposed to be the hostess."

They walked back, their clasped hands swinging between them.

THE REMAINDER of the evening passed quickly and without incident. She found a new ease now in smiling and making light conversation. The strain that usually gripped her at these gatherings was gone, dissipated by a few moments in the garden and an unspoken promise. She knew nothing about him, his past, his background, but it didn't matter. She scarcely spoke to him again during the party, and that didn't matter either. She was constantly aware of his presence in the room, real and near, and of his eyes unobtrusively following her.

The party was over eventually, and Anne stood at the door with her father, bidding the guests good night. Conrad held her hand lingeringly, and she had difficulty in maintaining a smile for him. Her resentment of his bold possessive eyes was more acute than usual.

"You were lovely, as always, my dear," he said. "They're showing some new moderns at the Midtown Galleries tomorrow night. May I call for you?"

"Thank you, Conrad." Her smile was bright and impersonal. "But I have an engagement."

"Another time, then. I'll call you."

Dr. Bentley came next and he kissed Anne on the forehead. "Very pleasant evening," he told her. "Do something for me, Anne. Make Peter slow down. I can't convince him that he was created with only one set of nerves, just like other people."

"I warn you, Jim," Peter cut in. His smile was crooked. "If you insist on being professional at my parties, I'll scratch your name off my guest list."

The doctor shrugged, turning toward Peter. "I'm only interested in keeping that guest list from turning into a list of spectators at the last public appearance of the late Peter Winthrop."

Amusement glinted in Peter's eyes. "I like that touch of drama, Doctor. Any time you get tired of tying up peoples' cut fingers and hearing about their aching backs, come to me. I might be able to make something out of you with a bit of tutoring."

They walked out onto the porch together.

There was only Ken left now, and Anne stood looking up at him, not wanting to say good night.

"Would that engagement tomorrow night be with me?" he asked softly.

"It would."

"Eight-thirty?"

"Yes. I'll be ready."

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She was still standing in the center of the hall, still smiling softly, when her father came back in closing the heavy door behind him. The bright alertness, the flashing humor was gone, stripped from his face like a mask. His eyes were empty and the lines that curved down from the ends of his mouth were hard and deep. It was not the face of age, but something else. Frustration? Sorrow? She didn't know. Her father was a stranger.

"You wished to speak with me?" He sounded tired.

"No." The radiance was there in her voice. "It was nothing." She turned away and started up the staircase, walking gently as though this glowing feeling inside her was a fragile, ephemeral thing that would shatter if she were not careful. "Good night, Father."

She scarcely realized that he had not answered. It was good to close her bedroom door behind her, to have this quiet privacy in which to cherish the memory of a look, the sound of a name.

Ken.

SHE WORE a new forest-green suit with a little close fitting matching hat for her date with him. She was ready long before he came, something that had never happened on any other date.

He helped her into his rather battered-looking car and then looked at her for a moment before he started to drive.

"Take off that hat," he commanded. "I don't like it."

Obediently, she pulled it off.

"Your hair is too pretty to cover up like that." He took the hat and tossed it into the back seat. "You won't need a hat where we're going, anyway."

"Which is where?"

He hesitated. "Maybe it would be easier to say where we're not going. Not to the theater. Not dining and dancing. I was thinking of a spot I rather like, a rathskeller. Checked tablecloths, candles in bottles. Now it occurs to me that maybe you don't like beer." Before she could answer, he went on. "Let's do something you'd especially like. Is there anything special you've always wanted to do and never had a chance?"

She knew he was poor. She probed back for all the little disappointments and whimsical ideas she had ever had.

"Lots and lots of things," she told him. "I've gone past the ducks in the park a hundred times and never once stopped to feed them. There never seemed to be time. That's one major frustration. Another is the street-cars. You know all those glamorous sounding destinations on the fronts? Echo Grove? Willow Heights? I want to ride on all of them and see what those places really look like."

"You'll be disillusioned," he said, "but we'll do it."

"Another time," she said. "Tonight I feel a strong desire to go someplace where there are checked tablecloths and candles in bottles and beer—of which I'm very fond."

She was rewarded by the brightness in his eyes.

They talked as though they had always known each other. He told her of his small town background and his recent interning period and of the struggle to get a practice started.

"I came here mainly because of Dr. Bentley," he said. "He knew my father years ago and he's been wonderful. He found me an office. It's in a house, the same place where I room. The landlady's late husband had been a doctor. So that was a break. And Dr. Bentley is trying to throw patients my way whenever possible. I don't have a nurse yet, though. It seems that none of them can live on what I can pay. I leave the door to the office open so that my landlady can hear the phone if I'm not there. So far, that hasn't been a major problem." His quick characteristic grin flashed over his face.

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And Anne talked of her own life. The camps in the summer time, the trips abroad, and of her father who was like a stranger to her.

"He's brilliant. You know that. And he has no patience with people who are not. Which is to say, most people. Including me. He wanted a son in the first place, so I was a disappointment right from the start. It wasn't so bad when Mother was living, but now it's more difficult. I find myself avoiding him and looking forward to the times he goes away." She had never told that to anyone. But with Ken, it was the most natural thing in the world to talk frankly of her feelings. In this short while, he had become very necessary, already linked to her life.

Before he took her home, he stopped the car and reached for her without a word. She went instantly and without restraint into his arms, giving him her lips. He held her closer after the kiss.

"Anne," he said, "I don't pretend to understand this. I'm in love with you. You know that, don't you?"

"Yes."

"We've just met. It doesn't make sense."

"It doesn't matter," she murmured joyfully. "It happened to me instantly. Last night. It's wonderful, Ken."

He kissed her forehead lingeringly. "I haven't any right to fall in love. I have nothing to offer you."

She closed her eyes, holding up her face for his kiss. "All I want is you. Just you."

THAT FIRST night set the pattern for all her dates with him. Sometimes they planned their activities in advance. More often, they were on the spur of the moment, subject to whatever moods they were in. They rode all the street-cars faithfully to the ends of the lines and back again, holding hands, and becoming well acquainted with more than one motorman. They found an ancient and obscure movie house which offered a flamboyant triple-feature bill, and they attended the entire show, with a box of popcorn between them and remembering to clap wildly every time the hero appeared on the screen. Once, when Ken mentioned he had come across the full-dress suit he had purchased second-hand in his freshman year, they decided to get all dressed up. Anne selected one of her best formals, a heavy white brocade with rhinestones sprinkled throughout the skirt. She dressed with the care she would have used if she were going to be presented at court and was more than repaid by the humble, thrilled admiration in Ken's eyes. They went to one cocktail lounge and then walked under the bright lights, window shopping and reading all the signs and placards. "People will think we're on our way to a party," Ken said. Later, after they had had a second cup of coffee in a second little restaurant, Anne said laughingly, "People will think we've just come from a party." No matter what they did, every moment was fun, a shining gem of treasure in memory until the next time.

And always, wherever there was a shadowy place, a spot of privacy, they turned instinctively to each other, impelled by their love to cling together as though they could never bear to let go, their lips pressed in sacrificial fullness.

The hours of the days and the evenings that she was not with him were lost time. When she was in town, she would call him and meet him for lunch. She found reasons for making more and more frequent trips into town, although the lunches were hurried little affairs in case some one should come into his waiting room, or his telephone ring, while he was gone. At those times, just the quick pressure of their clasped hands or the promises in their eyes had to suffice.

And then she met Sandy.

She had been lunching with Ken, noticing that he seemed excited and unable to keep his attention on their conversation.

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As soon as they were through, he jumped up, reaching for her hand.

"Now," he said, "come back to the office with me. I have a surprise to show you."

He refused to tell her on the way. When they had come to his office, he reached in front of her and swung open the door with a flourish. The little waiting room was empty of patients, but at the battered desk in the corner sat a young girl in a crisp white uniform, a starched band perched atop her dark head.

"A nurse," Ken exulted. "A real, live genuine nurse."

Anne smiled sideways at him, delighted with his pleasure. He guided her buoyantly to the desk and made proud introductions.

"Anne, this is Sandra Johnson. Known as Sandy."

ANNE SAW an attractive girl with small quick hands and short curling hair. Her eyes were large and dark in a provocative pixie face. "Hello, Sandy."

The nurse's smile was so impersonal it was almost cold. "How do you do, Miss Winthrop?"

Anne felt a little chilled. Two things were obvious—one that Ken must have spoken of her to Sandy, or she would not have known her last name, and the other, that the nurse had been intentionally formal. Ken, not noticing, had seated himself on a corner of the desk, one leg swinging.

"I've known Sandy since she was two feet high," he explained to Anne. "Our families were next door neighbors at home."

"Oh," Anne said, unable to think of anything to say. She felt ill at ease under the nurse's quiet scrutiny.

"She was the bane of my adolescence." Ken grinned sideways at Sandy. "Pigtails and braces on her teeth. I had a makeshift lab in the basement and she was always snooping around."

There was a sparkle in the depths of Sandy's eyes as she looked at Ken.

"You weren't any prize, yourself," she said in a low throaty voice. "All legs and no manners."

Ken shrugged. "I wasn't interested in being a movie star. Just a doctor."

"And I wanted to be a nurse," she pointed out. "I wasn't snooping. I was interested."

"I would have spread the velvet carpet for you if I could have foreseen the future."

The telephone rang, and Sandy reached for it. "Dr. Wylie's office." She opened the appointment book. "Yes, Mrs. Halcom. Any afternoon except Wednesday."

Ken slid quietly off the desk. He turned to Anne.

"It's going to make a lot of difference having Sandy," he told her. "It makes the office professional. Not to mention the help she'll be to me."

"I'm awfully glad, Ken. How did she happen to come to you?"

Sandy had hung up the phone and was blotting the entry she had made. Without looking up, she spoke before Ken could answer.

"It's one o'clock, Ken," she reminded him, "and you have two calls to make before you go to the hospital."

Ken grinned at Anne. "My boss says I have to get back to work. I'll see you to your car, anyhow."

He answered her question as he walked with her.

"Sandy called me up yesterday. She had just got here and she found my name in the phone book. I hadn't even seen her for four or five years. It still surprises me to think of her as grown up and a nurse in the bargain. Anyway, she asked me if I needed a nurse, and when I told her how little I could pay, she said that was fine and she'd start work right away. I've still got my fingers crossed."

You needn't, Anne said silently. She'd work for you for nothing. Anne had not

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missed the expression on Sandy's face when she talked to Ken, and she knew what Ken evidently did not know—that Sandy had loved him when she was in pigtails. And she loved him still.

IT SHOULDN'T make any difference, Anne told herself as she drove home. It shouldn't, yet she was definitely disturbed for some odd reason. She recalled the closed-out feeling that she had had as the two laughed over the past. This girl had a claim to a part of Ken that she could never claim—how he looked as a boy, how he talked, what he liked.

She stood for a moment after she had arrived home, looking in the hall mirror.

"Jealous," she said scornfully to the reflection, "over nothing."

Ken would be ashamed of her if he knew. She felt a little better after the self-chastising, and by the time evening came and her date with Ken, the feeling had all but vanished. He was the same wonderful companion as always, gay and adoring. He did not even mention Sandy.

They stayed out later than usual. When Anne put her arms up around his neck, she did it tightly with a sort of desperation. It was as though the moment of jealousy had deepened her love for him and instilled a fear that something might happen to take him from her.

"Ken," she whispered, "let's get married soon."

"Darling." He kissed her gently. "I have so little. I keep hoping things will get better soon."

"It doesn't matter, Ken. I don't want to wait."

He was silent for a moment. "Anne, are you sure? Is it what you truly want?"

"Yes. Oh, yes, Ken."

His own arms tightened suddenly. "It's what I want, too. It will be soon. I promise you."

She bid him a lingering good night on the porch. When he had gone, she went in the house to find Peter in the living room. This was unprecedented. There were three places where he could be found this time of night—in bed, at a party, or in his study, working. She knew he was there, waiting for her, although his back was turned to her as she came into the room. She stood silently as he filled his pipe with a drawn-out deliberation and turned finally, giving her a brief glance as he reached for a table lighter.

"You're seeing that boy rather frequently, aren't you, Anne?" The flame threw the sardonic lines of his jaw and forehead into dark relief.

He's not a boy, she said silently. Peter never used words ill-advisedly. If he said "boy," he meant it in all its connotations—immaturity, unfulfillment, confusion. Aloud, she said simply, "Yes."

"Why?"

If he expected her to be defensive, he was going to be mistaken, Anne thought. Her chin went high.

"Because I love him. Because I'm going to marry him."

There was nothing on her father's face to indicate that he had even heard her. He smoked in silence for a moment, and when he spoke it was in a matter-of-fact voice.

"Any woman who wishes to do so can make a good marriage. Even brilliant if she uses all her latent talents. No one needs to be a failure."

It was coming out into the open at last, and Anne welcomed it. The old numbing fear of him was gone. He couldn't hurt her any more, not with the memory of Ken's arms still warm and fresh in her heart.

"Why don't you say what you mean, Father? Mine would be a mediocre marriage. I would be a failure at this last chance to redeem myself. Is that it?"

HE LOOKED at her long and levelly. "You know my views concerning mediocrity. I prefer a flagrant scoundrel."

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"I know." Anne smiled. She had a sudden dizzying sensation of holding the whip hand. "You may as well face it, Father. You have a mediocre daughter. I always was. I always will be."

"No." For the first time there was feeling in his voice. "You merely think that. You've never tried to be anything else. And now you're planning on securing yourself in that category by making a dull and pointless marriage."

"That's only your viewpoint."

"Pointless," Peter went on, "for you. Not for him, of course. His practice would be assured, married to you. Nor would he have to worry about a living. He knows I would never permit my daughter to turn into a tired housewife or go without luxuries."

"I'll make that decision, Father. And you have no basis for that insinuation about Ken."

"I have a basis. Years of observation. Your thinking is still child-like. Physical attraction, the thing by which you are now dazzled, is only a small part of love and marriage. The rest is in the mind. You haven't learned that yet. A man who has to forge a career learns it early. Your young doctor wouldn't be the first who used prudence in selecting a wife. I don't hold that against him. I am merely interested in your making a marriage in which you would be the gainer."

"Such as?" She put scorn in the two words as an outlet for her anger.

"Conrad Laughlin. He's very wealthy. You would have ample time and means with which to travel and learn and perhaps eventually develop whatever your particular talent is."

"I'm sorry, Father," she said flatly. "These are not the middle ages. I'll choose my own husband."

He looked at her, his eyes narrowed. "Very well. But if your life and future mean anything to you, you'll think first. Think without emotion." He said in a matter-of-fact voice, "I'm flying to New York tomorrow. My new play opens next week. Would you care to come?"

"No. If you don't mind, Father."

His pipe had gone out and he relit it carefully. "Whatever you wish."

It would be the first time she had not gone to one of his openings. But those other times, her mother had been present. It made a large difference.

There seemed to be nothing more to say. She said, "Good night, Father," and went quietly out and up the stairs. This was as near to a break as she had come with her father. Even her happiness in Ken's love could not entirely mitigate the little aching sadness caused by her cold relationship with her father, and the fact that their minds seemed incapable of ever meeting.

She had a new green hat made to match the green suit. The lines were sweeping and soft, different from any hat she owned. It flared high on one side, accenting the soft waves of her chestnut hair that cascaded from the brim. Anne stood before the mirror in the little shop, adjusting it with pleasure and complimenting her milliner. Ken would like this one, she knew. It made her feel festive and in a mood for doing something special. She decided impulsively to go to Ken's office and see of he could take off the afternoon. She would look at him sternly and say, "Doctor, you're not looking well. Overworked. I prescribe an afternoon of pure laziness to be taken with one Anne Winthrop."

SHE PARKED her car before the old house and went jauntily up the walk to the office, liking the crisp coldness of the day and the way the new hat felt on her head. With a little half tune on her lips, she opened the door and entered the waiting room.

"Good afternoon, Miss Winthrop."

Anne felt a little startled. She had almost forgotten Sandy's existence.

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"Hello, Miss . . ." She had to leave it hanging. She had forgotten the nurse's last name, and she could not bring herself to say "Sandy" with a familiarity that was all one-sided.

"Doctor Wylie is busy with a patient," Sandy said. "Would you care to wait?"

There didn't seem to be much choice. Anne sat down and waited in a lengthening silence. Little by little, the festive mood slid away from her, and by the time the office door opened and a woman emerged with Ken behind her, she was wishing she had not come.

"I'll see you next week, Mrs. Baird." He turned to Sandy. "Did you get that clinic report ready for me, Sandy?"

"Yes, it's here. Miss Winthrop is here to see you."

Ken turned. "Hello, Anne," he said, surprise on his face. He came toward her. "What is it?"

"I was downtown and I just dropped by," she said in a tone that considerably missed the brightness she intended. "I thought if you weren't busy . . ." It all sounded rather silly now.

"I am, though, Anne. I'm overdue at the hospital right now."

She was acutely conscious of Sandy's presence in the room, and she felt like an intruder in their daily nurse-doctor work pattern. The sense of being closed out flooded over her again.

"I'll drive you over, then. I haven't anything else to do."

"Fine. Wait till I get my things."

She felt more natural when they were in the car away from Sandy's disturbing presence.

"You're really a brute," she told him. "I came to show you my new hat and you haven't even noticed it."

"Darling, I'm sorry," he said contritely. "I've had a lot on my mind today." He looked closely at the hat. "I like it. Very much."

"You better had. You're responsible for it, throwing away the one that went with this suit."

"It matches exactly. You were lucky to find one that color."

"That was easy enough. I had it made."

Ken was silent a moment before he asked, "Isn't that rather expensive?"

"Oh, I don't think so," she said. "No more than any good hat would be."

"Oh," he said, and that was all. For the remainder of the ride he was preoccupied and withdrawn. It wasn't the first time. There had been several moments lately when Ken had seemed to go far away from her. She bit her lip, trying to find a reason, and could think of nothing.

When she stopped before the hospital, she just smiled as though nothing were wrong. "I'll see you tonight, Ken."

He hesitated. "Anne, I'm terribly sorry, but I may not be able to make it again. I have clinic duty and you know how that goes. Sometimes it's pretty late."

And this wasn't new, either. He had been increasingly busy, and there had been several nights when she had not seen him at all.

"Oh, Ken!" She let her disappointment show. "This is the last night for that picture."

"I know." He frowned, thinking. "I hate to ask you, Anne, but if you could come in and meet me in town, we might make the last show. Would you mind doing that, darling?"

"No," she said quickly. "That would be fine. And even if we missed it, we could have a midnight snack somewhere."

"Good." He was himself again. "Wait in my office. That's the safest place. And I'll get there as quickly as possible."

She left him, feeling at peace. She had not wanted to be home tonight. Her father had come home this morning in a strange and disturbed mood. He had snapped without cause at Bryan and withdrawn to his study where she had heard him restlessly pacing the floor.

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She had dinner alone. Bryan told her that her father had only wanted the evening paper, saying he would dine later. She dressed and left the house even though she knew it was early. It would be pleasant just sitting alone in Ken's office, reading the old magazines and waiting for him.

She was surprised after she had opened the outer door into the waiting room to see that light fanned out on the floor from the partially open door to the office. Ken must have got through early, after all. She went quickly through the waiting room, her footsteps sounding hollow.

"Ken," she called.

The door opened all the way and Sandy, not Ken, stood in the frame of light.

"Ken's not here," the nurse said quietly. "I don't expect him back until late." She stood looking at Anne without expression, and Anne was again aware of the strange invisible barrier Sandy always seemed to throw up whenever she was present.

"He told me to meet him here," Anne told her. "I'll wait."

"As you wish." Sandy went back into the office and seated herself at Ken's desk. She resumed her work of making notations on the charts that were spread over its surface.

Anne walked restlessly across the waiting room and came back to stand in the doorway. She wished she could break down Sandy's aloofness and achieve some small measure of friendship with her.

"Do you always work this late?" she asked.

"When Ken works." Sandy didn't look up.

"Why? Is there that much to do?"

There was a bare second of hesitation before Sandy said, "Sometimes." Her voice was a shade lower than usual.

Anne heard the almost hidden note of desolation in the word, and a little pang of sympathy shot through her heart for this


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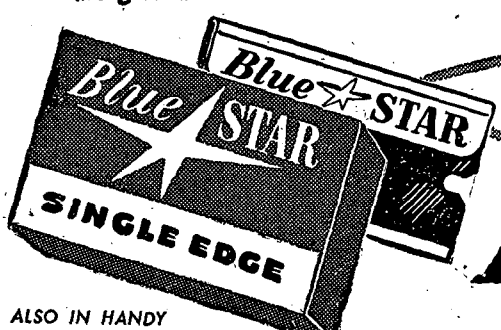


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girl who had been almost hostile to her.

"You're very fond of Ken, aren't you?" she asked gently.

She saw Sandy's back stiffen. Slowly and with deliberation, the nurse capped her pen and turned in her chair to face Anne.

"If you're asking if I'm in love with Ken," she said distinctly, "I am. Is that what you want to know?"

Anne bit her lip. Sandy made it sound as though she had been probing.

"Sandy . . ." She hesitated. "I'm sorry."

"Why? I'm not. I don't resent his marrying you."

Anne said nothing. She was farther than ever from the friendship of this strange, cold girl.

"I'm realistic," Sandy went on. Her chin went up as her mouth curved a little in a humorless smile. "I can't give him what you can. He's terribly hard-pressed. All these patients . . ." She waved a hand toward the charts. "I doubt if any of them will pay. These—and his clinic work. It keeps him busy, but it doesn't make for either a living or a future. A new doctor has to have influence, some one with position, with lots of friends. I can't give him that."

Anne's heart had begun to beat heavily. "That doesn't enter into my relationship with Ken." She sounded a little breathless.

"Or money." Sandy went on as though Anne had not spoken, "Money to cover rental of a decent office in a decent district, the cost of equipment, and just plain living until things get started. Ken worked like a slave to get his doctor's degree. He can't afford to let it all go smash now. He has to be realistic, too."

Anne's heart felt as though a hand had closed around it. "Ken's not marrying me for those reasons." Her voice sounded high and sharp, strange in her own ears.

Sandy was tapping the fountain pen against her hand in little measured beats. She said matter-of-factly, "Ken and I both had to make our way. We've both had to work. There wasn't anything very cloistered about either his childhood or mine. You grow up fast that way." Her beautiful husky voice rambled on conversationally. "We went through all that love-in-a-rose-covered-cottage illusion long ago. Knowing each other so very well, physical attraction, having everything in common, isn't enough. Not for marriage. That's only in the movies." Her smile curved a little crookedly. "You'll be Mrs. Kenneth Wylie. But don't be sorry for me."

Anne's hand groped for the door frame. She felt rocky. She wanted to shriek at this girl that her implications were lies. All lies. With an effort, she retained her composure.

"Ken hasn't even seen you for years," she told Sandy.

Sandy's eyes on her were unwavering. She said nothing.

"You were just a child when he left home," Anne said desperately.

And Sandy said nothing.

The waning strength of Anne's convictions ebbed away into nothing. Her words had been hollow, a groping at straws. Ken could have just told her anything that suited him, tossing out deceit as easily and convincingly as he made love. There rose clearly in her mind the adamant stark images of those moments she had tried to forget—Ken's odd withdrawals, her father saying, "He wouldn't be the first who used prudence in selecting a wife." She gripped her purse tightly, digging her fingers into the soft calf. She had to force herself to speak to Sandy.

"What you've said. All of it," she almost whispered. "Is it true?" She summoned all her strength and her eyes, commanding Sandy's, begged her not to lie.

Sandy returned the level look. "Yes," she said. Her eyes were very bright.

Anne turned blindly. She had got halfway across the waiting room when she was stopped by Sandy's voice behind her.

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"Do you wish to leave a message for Ken?" As practical, as casual as if Anne had been just another patient.

A message? What kind of a message did you leave for a man whom you had loved with all the love you had? What kind of casual second-hand words could be found in the debris of a shattered faith?

"Tell Ken . . ." Anne closed her eyes. "Tell Ken—I never came at all."

AFTERWARD, she never remembered driving home. She was conscious of going through the big front door of her own home and closing it behind her. Then she leaned back against it, needing its solid support. Dimly, she heard voices from the kitchen, Bryan and Leila talking to each other. She looked blankly at the flagstones in the hall floor. What could she do now? Where could she go, to talk, to cry? Her mother was gone. The grief she had felt in the first days following her mother's death poured over her in a fresh wave. There was only her father. There would be no comfort from him. There would be only his personal triumph and pitying scorn. And suddenly, perversely, that was what she wanted. There might be a strange relief in having it talked about and dissected and thrown at her.

She pushed herself away from the door under a sort of involuntary compulsion. Her heels clicked across the flagstones in a matching rhythm with the rapid rise and fall of her breast. Up one flight of steps. Across the landing. Down two steps. And there was his study with a line of light showing at the bottom of the door. She knocked once. Twice. There was no answer. She turned the knob.

"Father. . . ." When there was still silence, she pushed the door all the way open and went in. "Father, I'm . . ."

Her breath caught in a gasp. Her father was sitting in his chair, the upper half of his body slumped across the top of his desk in a queer rigidity. One arm was flung straight and stiff out before him, the crumpled page of a newspaper gripped tightly between the fingers.

Anne took a little backward step, her hand flying to her mouth.

"Bryan!" she screamed. She turned and ran up the steps to the landing. "Bryan!"

"I warned Peter." Dr. Bentley leaned forward to light his pipe before settling back in the chair. "I don't know why I bothered. There isn't much to be gained by saying 'I told you so.'"

Anne was sitting facing him in the living room. In spite of the fact that they were before the fire-place where a good fire was roaring, she felt cold. Her head was throbbing.

"Oddly enough," the doctor went on, "I'm glad it happened. It was bound to come and it was later than I thought. And less severe. He has a remarkable constitution. He'll be all right, Anne. It will take time, of course. Complete rest and that diet I gave you. I'm hopeful now that he's a little frightened. A man holds his life very lightly until he discovers how easy it is to lose."

"I hadn't realized," she said, "that he was that sick."

Dr. Bentley nodded. "Sickness takes a lot of forms. Peter's been sick since your mother died. He went to pieces then, only with Peter, it didn't show. That's the worst kind. He's been going on pure nerve stimulation for two years, working hard, playing hard, never letting go, never facing facts."

"I didn't know," she said wanly.

ALL THOSE parties, Anne?" the doctor gently queried. "His sporadic travel. The hours and hours in his study. And with all that work, he's only produced one play in two years. And that one a flop."

"Is it?" Anne pressed her fingers hard against her aching temples. She couldn't just go on saying I didn't know over and over like a record that had caught.

"Didn't you read that paper?" he moved

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his pipe a little, indicating the newspaper page on the cocktail table. It had been smoothed out, but it still bore the network of little lines from having been crumpled in Peter's hand.

"I read it, yes. But it was—just words. Father's had his plays criticized before Dr. Bentley. It never seemed to bother him. It doesn't seem possible that an adverse criticism could have done that to him."

"He was at the point where anything would have done it—even a small flare-up of anger. And this isn't just another criticism. It goes deeper." He reached for the paper and read aloud from it. " 'The hard-hitting satire, the biting cynicism that the theatergoers have come to expect from Peter Winthrop's plays is all there. But this time, it lacks the subtlety and the charm of presentation that has always been the saving grace of former plays. People like to be slapped a little, but not that hard. By the time they stop being dazzled by the playwright's name, they'll discover that they don't like what he has to give them. A great many have already discovered it. Unless Winthrop reverts rapidly to his former technique, he'll be learning that old laurels don't make new box-office receipts.' " The doctor folded the paper, creasing it precisely. He leaned forward a little. "You see, Anne? It's all there, what I've been telling you."

"I understand." She looked tiredly at Dr. Bentley. "I don't really know my father. We've never been—close."

He looked at her for a long moment, his eyes kind.

"I know, Anne," he said finally. "I could see that. And fond as I've always been of Peter, I can't condone that. Try not to be bitter. He needs you, Anne. If he doesn't know it now, he will some day."

She turned her face away so that he would not see the disbelief that tightened the corners of her mouth. You're wrong, Dr. Bentley. No one needs Anne Winthrop. No one in the world. But she did not say the bitter words aloud.

She was aware that he had risen, and she stood up and rang for Bryan before preceding him into the hall.

"Have you any sleeping pills?" he asked her.

"Yes."

"Take one. You've had a shock," he reminded her gently.

She nodded.

Dr. Bentley slid his arms into the coat Bryan held for him. "Peter will sleep tonight. And I'll send out a nurse first thing in the morning."

After Bryan had shown out the doctor, he turned to Anne. "Dr. Wylie called, Miss Winthrop. I explained about your father's illness and that you couldn't come to the telephone. He said he'd call in the morning."

"Thank you, Bryan," she said automatically. It had been procrastination, but she could not have talked to Ken tonight. Maybe tomorrow she would find the power in herself to tell him their little interlude was ended. Maybe tomorrow she could make the words of good-by so casual that he would never know she knew the truth or how terribly he had hurt her.

She undressed mechanically, remembering to take the sleeping pill. In spite of that, however, she lay awake for a long time, her eyes wide open and dry and burning. She felt numb, beyond the point of tears. She thought of tomorrow. It will pass, she told herself. And the next day. And the next. This is the worst right now. Little by little, the awful hurting place in her breast would fade. She would take a leaf from Peter's book. He had successfully buried grief, but he had been too intense. She would be more careful. How did you do it? You probed for your talents and abilities. Then you set your sights for a goal. And last, and most important, you ringed your heart around with steel so that it never got hurt again.

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KEN DIDN'T telephone in the morning. He came, instead, to the house.

She was in her bedroom when the maid who did the cleaning brought her the message that Dr. Wylie was in the living room. She finished dressing quickly, not taking time to think, scarcely looking in the mirror as she ran a comb through her hair. She wanted to get downstairs and get this thing over with. She could do it quickly without giving herself time to panic, like taking the first dive off a high board.

She saw Ken's eyes go tender and sympathetic as she came into the living room.

"Darling." He came toward her, his arms out. "How is your father?"

"He'll be all right." She stood stiff and unyielding as his arms closed around her. She closed her eyes, rocked by the dizzying sensation his touch provoked. She had to summon all her strength to fight the overwhelming desire to go limp in his familiar embrace. Oh, Ken, Ken. She had loved him so deeply. And he . . . Suddenly a new sensation swept through her, violent and hot. She knew what it was. It was hate. And after that, it was easy.

His arms dropped as she backed away from him.

"Dearest," he said softly, misunderstanding her stiffness, "you've had an awful shock, haven't you? I should have come to you last night."

"It wasn't necessary." Anne's voice was flat.

Ken shook his head. "I was late getting back, but I still should have come. I was worried about you for a moment there when Sandy told me you hadn't arrived. Then, when I called here and found out the reason, I was just relieved. I decided to let you rest."

Now this was Anne's opportunity.

She bent her fingers, studying the nails. "Father's attack occurred later in the evening," she said casually. "That isn't the reason I didn't meet you."

He frowned a little. "Why then, Anne?"

She shrugged. "I just didn't feel like going to the bother."

"Anne." His voice was very quiet. "What's the matter?"

"Oh, Ken." She flung up her chin, meeting his eyes challengingly. "Let's not drag it out. It's been a lot of fun, but can't you see it's over? I think it's much more pleasant, and adult, too, to end these little romances before going through a long period of boredom and pretense."

"Anne!" His hand closed tightly over her arm as his eyes narrowed searchingly on her face. "Are you saying you're—not in love with me?"

"Please, Ken." She frowned, lightly disengaging her arm. "I don't want a scene. Especially now with Father ill."

His arms went limp, hanging in defeat at his sides.

"I see," he said quietly. "I aimed a little high, didn't I, Anne?"

"Yes, Ken," she said clearly. "I'm afraid you did."

She did not move, not even to turn her head, as he went past her and through the hall. Not until she heard the door open and close again did she allow herself to relax. She had done it and her pride was intact. She felt as a soldier must who returns victorious from a war in which he didn't believe and didn't want to fight. The thing was done. You tried to forget the aching scars and from this point go only forward.

THERE is a limit to which catastrophe, like pain, can affect a person. When Anne discovered that her father had no money, she was astonished but unshaken. It seemed to make very little difference.

She had decided to plunge right into the task of the business management of the house. Dr. Bentley had told her Peter was to be spared all worry and as much thought as possible while he regained his strength. It was a new and strange procedure to

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Anne to be going through her father's desk, making notations of the dates and amounts of the large stack of bills there. Then she had got out the check-book and the last bank statement, looked unbelievingly at the small balance. She let everything stay where it was until Dr. Bentley came for his next visit. She showed him what she had found.

"There must be more," she told him, "but where? I don't know where to begin."

Dr. Bentley called the bank and the balance was confirmed. No, there was no other account. No, he did not have a safe deposit box. Anne found some correspondence from a broker in the desk, and Dr. Bentley telephoned him with the same luck. Mr. Winthrop had lost in some speculative stocks a year ago. He had cashed all his securities following that and bought nothing since that time. Dr. Bentley spread his hands, looking at Anne.

"I guess that's it," he said. "Peter may be a genius in some ways, but he evidently has no sense about finances. He's been living expensively with nothing coming in." He paused. "You'll have to let the nurse go, Anne. And the servants. Can you manage?"

"Of course."

"Give me that list of creditors. I'll write them myself. Maybe they'll wait for a while under the circumstances of Peter's illness. Then, when he's better, you can talk to him. He'll have to sell this house, and he may decide to declare bankruptcy. But we'll let that ride for a while. See how long you can go on what's in the bank. And come to me when it's gone, Anne. Peter's my friend, you know."

Anne found a smile for him, the first since that night she had discovered Ken's deceit. "Thank you, Dr. Bentley. I'll make it last."

Housework, too, was new for Anne. Gradually, she found ways to make it less difficult, but the house was big, and Peter required much of her time. She welcomed it, waking each morning to a fresh mountain of work that kept her mind inactive and sent her to bed exhausted at the end of the day.

Her father's speech which had been almost totally affected at the beginning was returning, and he talked a little to her during the times she was in his room. He noticed early that the servants were gone, but Anne was so casual about it that he did not mention it again.

She was dusting in his room one day, thinking that he slept, when she was a little startled by the sound of his voice.

"They were wrong," he said.

Anne turned to find his eyes intent upon her. He went on talking, an odd quality of softness in his voice.

"The people who always called you 'Peter Winthrop's daughter.' You're her daughter. You're she. All over again." Anne knew he was referring to her mother. "Funny," Peter said. "All these years I never—even—looked." His words sounded labored.

ANNE'S throat felt tight. This was it, what Dr. Bentley had told her would happen. She knew it was as close to sentiment as Peter would go. Still, there was in his words an apology and a plea. She had to let him know she understood. She smiled a little. "Thank you, Dad."

His eyes stayed unwavering on her face. "That doctor—what's-his-name. Marry him. A man's much better—with the right wife."

The tightness in her throat became suddenly unbearable. She turned and fled from the room before he could see the stricken look on her face. In the hall, she pressed her handkerchief against her mouth, fighting a hysterical urge to laugh.

Before his illness Peter Winthrop would have appreciated this ironical twist.

She drove herself relentlessly that day. In the afternoon, she stood in the kitchen, looking at the kitchen floor that had be-

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come so dirty she could no longer ignore it. She had never washed a floor in her life. It was a large floor, yet Leila had somehow kept it shining without any apparent fuss or bother. Anne scarcely knew how to begin.

She remembered suddenly a maid who had been here when she was a child. Rushella. Big and comfortable, Rushella had regaled her with strange philosophies while Anne sat perched on a stool, munching cookies. Rushella had done everything in a big way. When she got ready to wash the kitchen floor, she tied a mammoth apron around her generous middle and filled a big pail with soapsuds. "These gadgets they invent," she would snort, "to save folks's backs. You listen to me, child. There's only one way to get a floor clean. You get on your knees and you scrub it." Anne remembered vividly the sweep of the brush across the floor, the little moaning song that came from Rushella's lips, and the swaying of her body as she worked, all blended in a beautiful rhythm.

Anne got a pail, a brush, and an apron, and went conscientiously to work. She had got one-quarter of the way through when she paused, surveying sadly the portion she had finished. It didn't look very clean. She was wondering what she was doing wrong, when the chimes sounded, announcing some one at the front door. The apron flapped wetly as she got to her feet. That water seemed to splash all over the place.

She went to the door and opened it without a thought of how she looked or who might be there.

"Hello, Anne."

The sight of Ken standing there was a jarring physical shock, and she stood, just staring, for a moment. When she found her voice, it was high and unnatural.

"What do you want?" she asked abruptly.

"Dr. Bentley had an out-of-town case. He asked me to look in at your father today."

She saw his black bag then, and she stood aside, letting him come in. He looked at her and she became conscious of how she must look. She pushed futilely at some straggling wisps of hair. He made no comment as he shed his coat and tossed it over the back of a chair.

"Where is your father?"

"Upstairs," she said in a monotone. "I'll show you."

She led him to the darkened room. "Will you be needing me?"

"I don't believe so. It's just a routine check."

SHE WENT mechanically back down the stairs and on into the kitchen. She felt wooden, numb, everywhere except in her breast, where her heart ached cruelly. They didn't work—the bands of steel she had imagined would protect it. It had needed but one look at him to know that her one-sided love was still there, and to re-open the wound his perfidy had inflicted.

She went doggedly back to her interrupted task. She gripped the brush so tightly her knuckles turned white, and she pushed it with all her strength forward and back over the linoleum. You get on your knees and you scrub it. It ran through her mind like a chant, over and over. There was a strange sort of relief in the prosaic words, like a remembered snatch of lullaby out of the shadowy hours of early childhood. It kept her from being too conscious that he was here in this house, close by. It kept her from ticking off the seconds, fervently wishing that he would finish and she could see him out the big front door and stop fighting the lump in her throat and the burning under her eyelids.

"What's the idea, Anne?"

She straightened abruptly, startled at the unexpected sound of his voice.

"What do you mean?"

He indicated the floor, the pail beside her. "All this. You have servants, don't you?"

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"Had," she said briefly. She stood up, wiping her hands on her apron which was already a limp, grayly-soaked rag. "How is my father?"

"He's doing remarkably well. He has a strong heart. There's nothing to do but keep up the rest and the diet. You ought to have a nurse for him, though."

"There's no need for a nurse," she said in little clipped tones. "I can manage very well."

She took a step forward and stopped because Ken virtually filled the doorway. He kept looking at her, the puzzled lines in his forehead deepening.

"Anne," he said finally, "I don't get it. Why this austerity program?"

"Dr. Bentley didn't tell you, then. I suppose that's ethics." She put her hands on her hips. It was easy not to have any pride, looking the way she looked. There might even be some balm in throwing it at him, in seeing his reaction to the near mistake he had made. "It should be obvious. We're broke. Flat. No money." She enunciated the words clearly but with no expression.

"I didn't know, Anne. I'm sorry. That's hard for you."

"Oh no, it isn't." She tossed her head. "I'm young and healthy. What you really mean is that it doesn't fit your picture of me. The fragile princess surrounded by servants and a never-ending supply of money. Prescription for the wife of a poor young doctor." She spaced her words with sarcasm, her mouth curved in a smile without humor. "It was your prescription for yourself, Doctor, and it shows good judgment—I'll give you that. But you came awfully close to having it filled wrong. The patient would have suffered."

"Anne." His voice was quiet and intense. Without taking his eyes from her, he set the bag on the floor. "What are you talking about?"

It was an effort to hold her lips in the artificial smile. They had begun to tremble. "Don't pretend, Ken. Can't you just leave? Now."

He took two long strides toward her. He gripped her shoulders, his fingers digging into her back painfully. Her emotions came flooding to the surface, finding an outlet in a burst of hurt anger.

"You walked on the floor," she flared. "I just washed that part."

"The hell with the floor," he said roughly. "Now say all that again. And this time, say it in plain talk."

She returned his dark burning gaze. "Do you want pictures? Of words of one syllable? You wanted me—needed me for what you thought would be position and money. If you were marrying for love, you would be marrying Sandy."

He stared at her. "Who told you that?"

"First my father. Then Sandy. I was the fool for not figuring it out myself."

"You were the fool to believe it." His eyes traveled over her hair and face and came to rest on her lips. The stiff anger went out of him all at once. His arms went suddenly around her as he pulled her tightly against him. "Anne," he said huskily, "I love you." He kissed her mouth, her chin, her ear. "I love you. Don't you know that? Haven't you always known it?"

She couldn't speak for a moment. She pressed her face against his, lost in the intoxication of being again in his arms and feeling the intensity of his love and desire. When she could think, her voice was small and muffled sounding.

"You left me, Ken." She rubbed her cheek against his, her eyes closed. "When I told you we had made a mistake, you—just accepted it. I thought—it couldn't matter very much to you."

"Darling." She felt his fingers smoothing the hair back from her forehead and moving down under her chin, forcing it up. She opened her eyes, looking into the deep tenderness of his. "I thought your love for me was over. Dead. You sounded

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that way. Looking back, I thought that I had appeared on the scene in time to fill a temporary need for you—your need to be loved. And when that was satisfied, I figured you just took a long cold look at the prospect of an impecunious future with me. And you didn't want it."

"Oh, Ken!" She buried her face against his shoulder. "How could this have happened to us?"

She felt his head lift. "A lot of little things, I suppose, Anne. It worried me right along, your being used to nice things, taking them for granted. I wondered if I would really be able to make you happy, if our love would be enough. And Sandy said things—not much—but enough to keep the doubts there."

Anne looked up. "It was really Sandy who broke us up, then."

"Don't hold it against her, darling. I think she sincerely believed we were wrong for each other."

"Maybe. She's in love with you, Ken."

He smiled a little. "It won't last. It can't last. Love is a little like freedom, Anne. It comes to you as a gift, but you have to work to keep it. That's why we nearly wrecked ours. We thought we had a perfect love—you and I. But it wasn't so perfect that we didn't let doubts creep in. Our faith wasn't so strong that we didn't listen to other people. And in the end, we even let our damned pride take the whip hand."

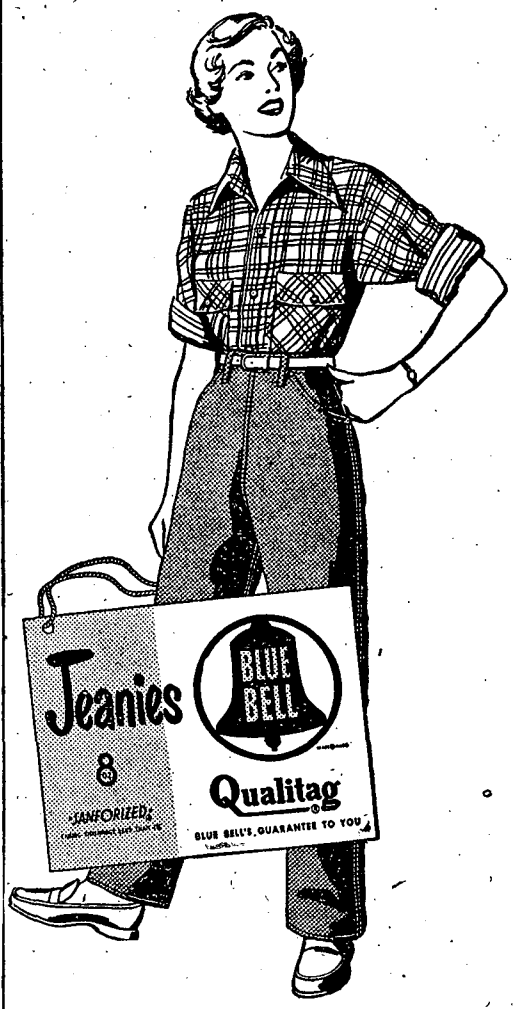
Anne nodded slowly. "We've learned something, Ken."

"I think so. Some people learn it too late. We're lucky."

Lucky. It seemed an inadequate word for a discovery like this. To know that perfection grew out of the awareness of flaws. Not just to feel, but to know that a lifetime of beauty and enduring love lay ahead.

Anne raised her lips to Ken's for the long perfect kiss that was the beginning of that lifetime.


# How to buy better work and play clothes

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By
HELEN
LATHROP

*She stiffened with anger and asked, "Are you ashamed of me, Jerry?"*



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# Holiday's End

**Love sometimes blinds a girl so much she chooses the wrong man.**

It was Labor Day, the end of the summer season. Tomorrow, the beach would be emptied of bright umbrellas. The gay Blue Hen Hotel would be practically deserted. Concessions on the board walk would shutter.

Hearing the talk on the terrace, in the cocktail lounge and dining room, Jocelyn Starr began to wonder if she might not be the one remaining guest. Everyone else, it seemed, was going home to his job and the responsibilities of everyday life. As she dressed for the final big night, she debated her decision to linger on at the Delaware resort for another week.

It might be wiser to drive to New York in the morning with Neil Marriot. She liked Neil. He might have been her summer love, or more, if she had not met Jerry Blake first.

But that was the way it had happened, and she had promised Jerry that she would stay until next Sunday when he would have finished his job at the hotel. Then, she

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would ride North with Jerry. In the meantime, his work lighter, they would have a wonderful week together.

Jocelyn finished dressing, anticipation banishing doubt. Every night was dance night at the luxurious Blue Hen, but Labor Day was a special occasion and she had saved a special dress. White stiffened chiffon, gold-threaded, with a wide ankle-length skirt and strapless bodice. She glanced at herself in the mirror. Jocelyn was never anxious about her looks. It was unnecessary.

She had dark hair that curled back softly from a small, delicately featured face. Two weeks of August sun had turned her skin to pale gold. Her eyes were deep violet. Her slim young figure was a model's figure—and her livelihood.

Throwing a sheer white stole over her shoulders, she went down to the terrace where she was meeting Neil Marriot for cocktails before dinner. Jerry was joining them in a drink. Later, he would dance with her once or twice. Not more often. Jerry was the hotel's entertainment director and obliged to divide his attention among the guests.

Jocelyn paused at the open doors leading to the terrace. Both Neil and Jerry were waiting at a corner table. Young and hard and fit, they were easily the most attractive men around the hotel. She looked at them thoughtfully. Neil Marriot was dark with a lean, rather grave face that his occasional, unexpected smile had a way of lighting winningly. In contrast, Jerry had smooth wheat-gold hair and an easy smile. Jocelyn stepped outside and they stood up.

Jerry said, "Hi, beautiful!"

NEIL gave her a slow, winning smile that started in his deep-set gray eyes. He had begun, she thought a little sadly, to reserve it for her. And tomorrow he would be gone.

A waiter appeared, and they ordered bacardis. Jerry insisted that the round be on him because he could stay for only one drink.

"The joint's going to be jumping tonight," he said, "and so am I."

He drank his cocktail swiftly while Neil and Jocelyn sipped theirs, and rose again. "See you in the dining room. Probably swipe a dance or two, if you don't mind, Marriot." He grinned at Neil, then turned meaningful eyes upon Jocelyn with a murmur of, "Later . . ."

Followed by her faint, troubled frown, Jerry swung off jauntily. She did not like his turning her over to Neil night after night. She realized that Jerry could not give her all his time, but he overdid the business of showing no special interest in her. It would be different later—after the band had gone home and the hotel had settled to quiet. Away from the eyes of hotel management and guests, she and Jerry would stroll along the boardwalk or on the moon-drenched sands of the beach. He would hold her arm fondly and possessively and, before they parted, his mouth would take hers.

A glow of mingled excitement and unease made her catch her breath. Simultaneously, she became aware that Neil's gaze was upon her. She flushed and found it difficult to meet his deep-set gray eyes. He had been in the lobby last night and had seen her and Jerry returning from their late walk.

"The days are getting shorter," Neil observed. "We'll have time for just one more drink before it's dark and time to go in to dinner."

She relaxed. She might have known he would not question her. He was innately courteous. They drank, talking idly, and watched twilight descend upon the Atlantic. It was pleasant sitting with Neil. He had the gift of making even silences companionable.

"I'll miss you, Neil," she said impulsively. "We've had fun, haven't we?"

He looked at her through the gathering

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dusk. "It isn't over yet. We have tonight ahead of us," he said, low-voiced, his smile inscrutable.

In the air-conditioned dining room, they were led to the table that they had earlier made theirs. The band was already giving forth with gay, inviting music. As soon as their dinner order had been taken, Neil drew Jocelyn out on the dance floor. He had a keen sense of rhythm and held her the way she liked to be held, firmly but not smotheringly.

Moving effortlessly in the circle of his hard young arm, Jocelyn thought, He should have been the one—we the two. Neil was all that she admired. He had intelligence and humor, kindness and understanding. Money had not spoiled him.

"This Neil Marriot," Jerry had said, before introducing him to her, "is what you girls call a dream boat. I'm taking a chance on losing out with you, beautiful, but he's asked to meet you. And since it's my job to keep guests merry . . ."

Jerry had laughed and shrugged. He knew that the chance he was taking was small. Her swift, electrical response to him at their own meeting two days before, had been too strange and startling for concealment.

The music came to an end, and she and Neil went back to their table and their dinner. They ate clams on the half shell while couples streamed out for the next number. Jocelyn saw Jerry dancing with a plain, plumpish girl from Philadelphia who had come down for the week-end with her mother. She was very rich, very social, and very bemused by Jerry Blake. The round face that she tipped up to his was suffused with radiance. Fervently, Jocelyn hoped that her face did not reveal such idiotic bliss when dancing with him.

"Blake's done a marvelous job down here," Neil said, also observing. "The Blue


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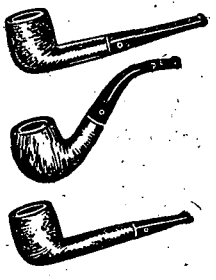

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Hen was never as popular as it's been this summer."

"Funny name for a hotel like this—the Blue Hen." Jocelyn wanted to talk of something else. "But Delaware is called the State of the Little Blue Hen, I heard. There's some song about it, isn't there?"

Neil nodded absently, his gaze on Jerry whose shining head was bent deferentially to his plump partner. "You've got to hand it to Blake," he went on. "He works hard at a job that I'd hate and couldn't handle. I don't know another guy who could do it as well."

He paused, then, half in jest, half in earnest, asked, "What's Jerry boy got that I, and fellows like me, seem to have missed out on?"

She reached out and touched his strong, sun-browned hand lightly. "You're rather special yourself, Neil."

She would have liked to explain Jerry Blake's fascination for her. It was not the usual summer crush on a handsome, professionally charming young man. Before Jerry, there had been another boy with wheat-gold hair and a quick jaunty way of walking. Jocelyn would have liked tell Neil about her young lost love, but it was not the place to talk about David who had crashed on a Texas training field. It was not the time.

Neil was going home tomorrow. He had written down her New York telephone number and the name of the model agency for which she worked, but it was unlikely that she would see or hear from him. Were she driving North with him, it might be different. Jocelyn knew another moment of regret that she put from her, along with the desire to confide in him.

Holiday's end.

THE PARTY grew noisier and more hilarious by the hour. Barriers were dropped, restraints forgotten. Now that there was no risk of entanglements, guests who had merely bowed to one another became bosom friends. Jerry Blake was in constant demand.

It was after midnight before he had a chance to do more than nod and wave at Jocelyn and Neil. He came over to their table and sat down, grimacing.

"What a night!" He covered a yawn. "Tomorrow I sleep all day."

She lifted mental eyebrows. That did not promise too much fun for her. Jerry seemed to sense her thought, and grinned.

"Of course," he added, "I'll do some of my sleeping on the beach, in the sun."

"Doesn't old man Hewlitt," Neil asked, "usually bring Claudia and her mother down here for a week or two of quiet immediately after Labor Day?"

"I wouldn't know," Jerry said. "There are no plans for this year. Claudia and her mother are in Europe."

The question and answer seemed innocent. It was the tone of their voices that made Jocelyn look from one to the other. Neil's had been too bland. Jerry's was stiff with annoyance. She could not understand why?

Old man Hewlitt was George P. Hewlitt, owner of Hewlitt Hotels, Inc., a chain that stretched from Maine to Florida. Claudia was his daughter. Jerry had mentioned knowing her in college. He had made it sound like a very off-hand acquaintance.

The band started off their next number with a rhumba. After a polite "May I?" to Neil, Jerry turned to Jocelyn. "Shall we dance?"

He did a beautiful rhumba. She went out on the floor with him eagerly. His fast tricky steps were always a challenge to her own agile feet. Tonight, however, Jerry was not in his usual good form. His steps were methodical, almost plodding.

"Tired?" She smiled up at him with a touch of malice, and surmised, "The Philadelphia heavyweight must have worn you down."

"She's something of a load to shove around," he admitted, with an air of having

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his mind on something else. "I'll be glad," he said a minute or two later, "to have that fellow Marriot out of my hair tomorrow. He's a stinker, really."

Jocelyn stared, shocked. "Neil's sweet. He knows that I'm staying over to have my real vacation with you, but he doesn't mind. He buys me cocktails and dinner, just the same. What did he do?" She paused and hazarded a guess. "You didn't like him suggesting that the Hewlitts might come down here, did you?"

"Who wants his big boss on his neck?" Jerry demanded. "But they're not coming, at least according to Cl..."

She thought that he had been about to say, "Claudia." She could not be sure. Some one had yelled, "Conga!" and it was sweeping the floor. She and Jerry were caught up in the fast-forming conga line.

THE FINAL dance of the evening and the season, Jocelyn had with Neil. The band played an elaborate arangement of *The Last Rose of Summer,* and the dancers sang with it and left the floor feeling pleasantly melancholic. Neil signed his bill, and they went out to the lobby.

He accompanied her upstairs, to the door of her room. It had become a custom. She inserted her key in the lock, then turned to him, smiling faintly, her soft lips ready for his light good night kiss that, tonight, would be good-by. That also had become a custom but it was one from which Neil, to her confusion, chose to deviate. Instead of bending his dark head to brush her mouth with his, he grinned and put a hand on her shoulder.

"The night's not over," he said. "Get a coat, my dear. I have a yen for a ride in the moonlight."

Her violet eyes widened. It was totally unlike Neil Marriot to command, rather than suggest. He had not even inquired if she shared his yen. When, startled, she made no move to obey, he turned her key and gave her a gentle push into the room. He waited in the doorway for her to find her coat.

Puzzled and a little alarmed, she made slow work of taking a black taffeta duster from the closet. It occurred to her that his behavior might have something to do with the night before. After leaving her at her door, supposedly sleepy and headed for bed, he had seen her come in from her late date with Jerry. Had Neil jumped to ugly conclusions that he would try to presume upon? She turned from the closet warily, duster in hand, and was reassured by his slow winning smile.

She smiled back and Neil became his courteous self again. In the elevator, riding down to the lobby, he said, "I did some inquiring today and got a card to a so-called club about ten miles north of here, whose bar and kitchen will still be open, and whose charcoal-broiled steaks are reported to be terrific. Interested?" He added, "It's been a long time since dinner."

"Very much interested," she told him promptly.

Evidently, he had planned ahead for this last night of theirs. That touched her. She thought, not without a hint of satisfaction, that Jerry would wait in vain tonight for her to meet him on the boardwalk. Seeing those stolen meetings, as Neil might have seen them, Jocelyn was angry at both herself and Jerry. It had been idiocy on her part and selfishness on his, to risk speculation and gossip.

JERRY was in the lobby, surrounded by women of assorted ages who were assuring him, individually and collectively, that he had made—but made—the summer. Glancing over their heads, he saw Jocelyn and Neil emerge from the elevator. The smile that Jerry had been wearing froze on his face.

Jocelyn waved to him with a fine show of carelessness.

Neil chuckled, and said, "Poor guy!" With that, he guided her out to his car.

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The so-called club was located on one of the small bays that indented that stretch of the coast. It had the air of a well-run mansion house. They were admitted by a very correct butler. Their steaks, cooked to tender perfection, were served in a quiet, softly lighted dining room.

"Heavenly food, heavenly place." She sighed her contentment. "Too bad you didn't hear about it until today."

"Oh, I did. I knew it was here, but . . ." Neil gave her a direct look. "I had an idea you liked to stay close to the hotel."

Close to Jerry Blake, he meant. Guilty color warmed Jocelyn's face although she had not tried to fool him as to where her real interest lay. She was glad of that now. She had glimpsed tonight, beneath his easy-going surface, a Neil Marriot who could be hard and would not take kindly to fooling.

They ate their steaks with leisurely enjoyment and lingered over fragrant coffee. The moon had begun to wane before they started back for the Blue Hen.

"And you were planning to start early this morning for New York!" Jocelyn cried, as she settled herself in the convertible. "You'll never make it."

He put the car into gear. "I'll make it," he said lightly.

"You'll be dead from lack of sleep," she said, and then asked, "Why don't you stretch out your vacation another day, or until Sunday, the way I'm doing?"

The question was born of a sudden, inexplicable wish that he would, and brought his eyes around to her, before he put the convertible in motion. However, he shook his dark head.

"Holidays must end sometime for most of us," he said, "and now seems to be the right time for me."

It sounded almost as if he were warning her that it was a mistake to prolong her vacation. Again she was prodded by doubts of her wisdom. She half expected him to repeat his invitation for her to drive North with him. She might have accepted, but he was no longer looking at her. He swung the car out of the club drive onto the highway.

DRIVING at a comfortable speed, the road white and empty ahead of him, he said, "The prospect of a week here, without a mob of tourists around is tempting, I'll admit. But I have a job that I work at, Jocelyn. I really do. Believe it, or not."

She believed it. Jerry had told her about Neil Marriot, marveling at him. Neil chose to work. He personally supervised the huge tool manufacturing company that he had inherited. He had taken a degree at M. I. T. to fit himself for the job. The Army had refused to accept his enlistment, deeming him of more value to his country in his present position.

"Try to imagine it. I can't," Jerry had said. "Marriot's positively sticky with money, but he goes to an office five days a week and takes off only two weeks in the summer, like a wage slave." Jerry had then added cynically, "It must be true that having money stirs up an itch for more."

Remembering, she regretted letting the facile pronouncement go unchallenged. Jerry had been completely wrong.

Neil went on. "It sounds kind of stuffy, but the government has a dopey idea that I'm doing an important job, so I feel it's up to me to stick close to it. Now laugh at me, if you want to."

He laughed himself ruefully.

Jocelyn put a hand on his arm. "Don't, Neil. I think you're wonderful," she said softly. Then, amused at her own expression, she asked, "And what do I sound like?"

He turned to her, his gray eyes bright. "Like a bobby-soxer, looking for an autograph," he told her.

They laughed together, while the convertible ate up the ten miles to the beach.

The lobby of the Blue Hen was empty

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except for a clerk who drowsed at the switchboard. If Jerry had waited for her, Jocelyn thought, he had long since given up. She and Neil said a cheerful "Good morning!" to the clerk, who blinked at them sleepily. They were in the self-service elevator before he wakened enough to manage a dazed "Good night."

Neil pressed the button for her floor and, for the second time within hours, took her to her door. For a second time, she inserted her key in the lock and turned to him, but not as calmly as she had before. There was a new expectancy within herself, a queer breathlessness. She lifted her violet eyes to his gray ones, feeling hynotized.

They looked at each other, and could not look away. His arms went around her and drew her to him. She feared that he would feel her trembling, and then did not care. His face came slowly nearer and nearer. His lips took hers slowly, savoring the sweetness of the moment. She closed her eyes and let herself melt against him.

HIS KISS was like none that she had ever known. It was not fierce, but a little clumsy, as David's had been. It was not smooth and deliberately exciting, as were Jerry's. Neil's mouth was gentle on hers and yet all-giving and all-demanding.

When they drew apart, she backed against the door and clung to its knob for support, one hand behind her. He took the other and smiled down at her.

"That was a lovely good-by," he said.

The word good-by had a dirge-like sound in her ears. Crazily, she felt tears gathering.

"It's all been lovely. Knowing you, I mean," she faltered. She struggled for, and achieved, the commonplace to the nth degree by finishing a little wildly. "G—good-by. I hope you have a nice trip."

A glimmer of laughter leaped to his eyes that she saw in the second before she whirled to open her door.

It was almost dawn but Jocelyn did not immediately go to bed. She sat in her bath robe and slippers, mechanically brushing her shining dark hair, trying to fathom the turmoil within herself.

In the twenty months since David's death, she had lived on an emotionless plane. She had dined and danced occasionally with men, but until she came to this Delaware beach and met Jerry Blake and Neil Marriot, none had stirred her. It was bewildering to find herself capable of responding not only to one but to both of them.

Her thoughts went back to David. They had met in college and fallen youthfully and whole-heartedly in love. When he quit in the middle of his junior year to become an Air Force cadet, she had also abandoned college and registered with a model agency. Modeling seemed the quickest way to make money for both a trousseau and a hope chest.

She and David had planned to marry when he won his wings, and live to the full

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what time might be accorded them. But David's wings had been posthumous ones. Jocelyn had thought she would never love again. She had come to the Blue Hen, empty-hearted, with only a vague hope that she might meet someone who could bring her back to at least partial life.

Then, on the very first night, Jerry had walked up to her with David's jaunty swift stride. He had stood beside the table where she was dining alone, and introduced himself. His wheat-gold hair gleamed, as David's used to gleam. She looked at him with her waking heart in her eyes. And Jerry had seen and, although used to feminine adulation, he had seemed shaken by what he saw. He sat down quickly, and spent most of that first evening with her. It had been an enchanted evening.

SHE TRIED to be understanding when he told her the next day, "I'll have to be more careful, beautiful. We've found something big, and I hate every hour I'm away from you, but our manager doesn't care about that. I'm supposed to scatter my sweetness and light and, if I don't he may report to the head office. Then, away go my chances for a big job with the Hewlitt company."

The following afternoon, Neil Marriot had arrived at the hotel and asked to be introduced to her. Urged by Jerry, she had fallen into the habit of dining and dancing with Neil. Around the hotel, they were regarded as a twosome which was what Jerry seemed to want. Conscientiously, Jocelyn had tried to make it plain to Neil himself that they could be no more than playmates and friends.

He agreed, his gray eyes amused. "A summer flirtation? I've always wanted one."

A summer flirtation that could not touch her, that was what Jocelyn believed it to be, until tonight. And what had happened to her tonight? Her nerves rippled as she recalled his kiss, his good-by kiss. The hateful word echoed hurtingly through her quiet room.

She climbed into bed and pressed a tear-wet face against her pillow. She cried herself at length to sleep while the rising sun, unwatched, climbed rosily over the rim of the ocean.

Her watch said ten o'clock, and the sun was high, before awakening came. Jocelyn roused from sleep abruptly with the uncomfortable feeling that she had left something important undone. She lay still for a moment, and remembered. She had planned to sleep for just a little while, and be downstairs in time to see Neil off to New York.

That had been her last waking thought, but one that it was now undoubtedly too late to carry out. It had not been a very good thought to start with, Jocelyn told herself. She and Neil had said good-by last night. A morning farewell would be an anti-climax.

She rose and went to her window from which she could see the beach. It looked strange this morning without the clutter of bright umbrellas. The two that had been set up only emphasized the loneliness and emptiness. Going down to the dining room for a combination breakfast-lunch, she found it similarly deserted. Yesterday it had been filled with voices and laughter. Today the big room was tomb-like in its silence. Of all the gay vacationists, besides herself, only a few elderly persons and a honeymoon couple remained.

SHE LOOKED around for Jerry, but he was not in sight and, although she stretched out her lunch for an hour, he did not appear. He was either sleeping all day, as he had said he would, or sulking somewhere because she had gone off last night with Neil.

In mid-afternoon, she put on her strapless white lastex bathing suit which Neil had, laughingly declared should be banned as unfair competition to other women, and went down to the beach. After a short swim

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she stretched out on the sand. It was more pleasant on the beach than in her own room or the dining room, but the sun did not seem as bright as it had yesterday.

Holiday's end.

Neil must be in, or nearing New York. A sea gull screamed over her head, and she thought longingly of the clamor and business of the city. Sighing, she turned over and pillowed her face in her folded arms.

A trickle of sand down her back wakened her from a dream in which she was riding through the Holland Tunnel with Neil. His arm was around her, and her head was pillowed on his shoulder.

She rolled over and sat up dazedly. Jerry was standing above her, his back to the sun that turned his hair to smooth, poured gold. As she stared into the glare, his face was featureless, and she had a momentary illusion that he was David, come back to her. It vanished the next instant when he sat down beside her.

His resemblance to David stopped with his hair and his walk, she decided, looking at him with newly critical eyes. He was five years older than David would have been even now. David's eyes had been clear lake-blue, young and candid. They had revealed his every thought. Jerry's greenish eyes were worldly-wide and guarded.

"Why the icy once-over?" he asked, reminding her that she was staring at him. "And, by the way, it's you who's supposed to be in the doghouse, not me. I'm the guy you stood up last night. Remember?"

"I'm sorry, Jerry," she said, not with entire truth. "But it was Neil's last night. And then . . ." She hesitated. "I got to feeling queer, sort of cheap, about slipping out to meet you."

"Marriot read you a lecture, I bet."

She shook her head emphatically. "He didn't even mention seeing us."

"I hope he doesn't mention it around New York," he said. He stretched out and put his head in her lap. "Things have a way of getting back to old man Hewlitt."

She looked down at him curiously. "What difference would it make? Everyone is talking about the marvelous job you did here this summer."

"Maybe," he agreed lazily, "but the old man's a funny guy."

"What's the daughter like?" she asked.

"Claudia?" Jerry closed his eyes and smiled reminiscently. "Good looking, if you like them tall, cool and blonde. And who wouldn't, with a couple of million thrown in the package? Knows what she wants and goes after it. A bit on the bossy side. Claudia takes after her mother who is the only person on earth who can boss her, or would even dare try."

Jocelyn decided that he must know Miss Claudia Hewlitt better than casually to have formed such a concise, tabloid opinion of her. "You've dated her?" she asked.

"A few times," he admitted and then, sitting up, changed the subject. "Talking about dating," he said, "let's you and I have a date tonight. There's a juke joint in town where we might have a drink and a dance, after dinner. I'm not required to entertain old folks and newlyweds. Thank Heavens!"

She smiled. "Then you can have dinner with me, can't you?" she said. "It was positively ghastly at lunch, sitting alone in that empty dining room."

"I suppose so, but . . ." Jerry seemed a little embarrassed. "I think it's still a good idea not to advertise what pals we are. The manager's still around, able to see and report to the old man."

"I still don't understand." She stiffened with anger. "Are you ashamed of me, Jerry?"

"Of you, beautiful?" He caught her hands in his. "Are you crazy? I'm proud as the devil of being seen with you but, as I told you, the old man's funny. He has notions about what his employees should and shouldn't do. One of them is that they

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shouldn't get too clubby with guests, any guest." He added anxiously, "You can see his point of view, can't you?"

"No, I can't." Jocelyn was only partially appeased.

She dressed for a solitary dinner in a sheer wool dress of soft blue that would be suitable for juke-box dancing afterwards, and was ashamed and annoyed with herself. Pride should have made her tell Jerry that, if he could not appear in the dining room with her, to find himself another date. Twice, she picked up the telephone for that purpose, and then put it down. The quiet of her room and the emptiness of the hotel was appalling.

Holiday's end.

LATER Jocelyn regretted that she had not obeyed the dictates of her pride. Her date with Jerry was not a happy one.

It began by her having dinner alone. Jerry sat across the room with the night clerk and banquet manager. He stopped to speak to her on the way out with an air of elaborate casualness. He and his car, he said, would be waiting in the drive.

Her distaste for the evening grew. Again, she was tempted to tell him that their date was off, but a glance around the lobby deterred her. It was deserted except for two elderly gentlemen playing chess. Their wives knitted, counting stitches. There was a television set, but no one had adjusted it or was watching. It flickered grotesquely.

Neil had been so very right in saying that holidays must end, and he had ended his gracefully. She had chosen to linger on. She was truly the last rose of summer left blooming all alone, Jocelyn thought with wry amusement. She went out somewhat grimly to meet Jerry who did nothing to improve her mood by hurrying her into his coupe. He kept looking around him.

She was more than ever annoyed by his insistence upon secrecy. The Blue Hen's manager, Mr. Pierce Gleason, suave and amiable, had not impressed her as being a demon boss. One of the lifeguards, a stubble-haired collegian, had had nightly dates with a Baltimore debutante who was one of the hotel's most prominent guests. He had met her in the lobby. Jocelyn had seen him grin and wave blithely to his superior. Mr. Gleason had waved back with a benevolent smile.

Jerry had sped her downtown to a bar and grill that catered to the local bobby-sox trade. The juke box blared and the postage stamp floor was crowded with jitterbugs. Jocelyn ordered a Tom Collins that she put aside after the first sip. It was abominably mixed, over-sweet and watery. She and Jerry danced once, dodging the flailing arms and kicking feet of the bobby-soxers who shouted to each other across the floor.

She was glad to sit down. The night was as warm as midsummer, and the heat and noise combined to give her the beginning of a headache. She thought longingly of the coolness and quiet of the mansion-like club to which Neil had taken her. She pushed back her dark hair with an unconsciously weary gesture. Jerry noticed with annoyance.

"Okay. You don't like it," he said. "Let's blow."

She made no false protestations of enjoying herself. She welcomed the freshness of the night air. It was early, Jerry said and wanted to know if she cared to drive around for a while. Jocelyn would have liked that. She had seen little of Delaware.

JERRY, however, drove only as far as the outskirts of the town. There he turned and followed a needle-carpeted dirt road, deep into a pine grove. He parked, cut off his lights, and they were in darkness and stillness. The branches of the tall pines shut out the white September moon. A little nervously, she asked where they were.

"The town picnic grounds," he said. "Nice little hide-out, isn't it?"

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Hide-out. The word jarred. She stiffened against his reaching arms. But, she reflected, he had reason to assume that his secret kisses were what she wanted and expected. She made herself relax and tried to recapture the mood in which she had walked with him night after night on the beach. She tried to dream, as she had done before, that David's arms were around her, that it was David's mouth seeking hers.

He kissed her slowly and expertly, and it seemed, endlessly. The dream eluded her. David was gone, never to return. He seemed for a moment to be close, warning her to be done with dreaming and face reality. When he vanished, smiling youthfully and tenderly as he would always smile, he left her with an open heart and a crystal clear mind. His farewell gift was a sure, swift knowledge that Jerry Blake had no reality for her.

Her reality—her love—was Neil. When he kissed her last night, she had not needed to delve into memory to evoke a response. Her lips had wakened to new emotions, a desire that was for him alone.

"Baby, baby . . ." Jerry murmured, his lips against her throat, his breath uneven.

She pushed him from her, firmly. "Please, Jerry!"

"What's the matter?" he asked crossly, trying to pull her back.

"It's just . . ."

She broke off, fumbling for kind words with which to explain her withdrawal. There was a second of silence in which she heard the giggle, a girl's fluttery, excited giggle. Jocelyn looked around. At the same moment the lights of a car, not more than six yards away, flashed. They revealed two more cars parked deep in the pine grove. She whirled back upon Jerry and thrust his arms from her.

"This place," she said angrily. "Jerry, it's the town . . ."

"The town necking grounds." He laughed. "A natural, isn't it?"

He saw nothing cheap and common in having brought her to such a spot. Jocelyn saw the futility of anger and let it drain from her. Her voice came flat, expressionless, and effective.

"I'm tired, Jerry. Let's get going."

She could sense him trying to see her through the darkness. Then his lights flashed on, in their turn, and he maneuvered the car out of the grove.

The drive back to the hotel was fortunately brief. He let her out in the drive. Reaching over to open the door for her, he said somewhat huffily, "I guess I didn't show you much of a time. Marriot, no doubt, did better last night, but I haven't got his kind of money."

"It's all right, Jerry." She ignored his mention of Neil and tried to be polite. "This was one of my own off nights. I wasn't very good company. Good night."

She started to climb from the car but was stayed by his saying, "Wait a minute! How about a swim tomorrow morning?"

"I don't know," she began. She was already planning to be gone from the hotel as soon as she could get transportation. "Perhaps, if I'm around," she said vaguely.

"You should be up early." He misunderstood, as she had meant him to. "You're turning in early enough," he reminded her wryly. "Anyhow, I'll be down on the beach at eleven. I'll rustle up a beach umbrella."

She nodded and said good night again without making any promises. On her way through the lobby, she stopped at the desk to inquire about planes to New York. Only one northbound flight came down daily at the local airport to take on passengers. That was at three in the afternoon. She could get an early morning bus but that meant a tedious trip with a change en route. She was in no overwhelming hurry.

Her mind made up to leave the Blue Hen, Jocelyn felt at peace. Sitting by her window, looking out at the moonlit Atlantic, she thought happily of New York.

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The agency would have jobs lined up for her. Her Siamese cat, Pippin, would be glad to see her. She could almost hear him purring and meowing his delight. It occurred to her that she should wire the boarding house to have him groomed, ready for picking up the following night. Writing out a telegram and sending it downstairs, she began to feel as if she were already started North. Started on the road that she could only pray would lead to Neil. She might have thrown away her chance to win his love.

She prepared for bed soberly. The pleasures of New York that she had been contemplating were minor ones. Neil was the magnet drawing her back. Without him, the hotel, the beach, the whole world was empty.

New York and Neil. Neil and New York. The two were synonymous and, tomorrow night at this time, she would be in the same city as he. She could pick up her apartment telephone and say lightly, Hi! Back in town. The beach was a flop with everyone gone.

With you gone, my love! Would he understand? She slept, torn between tremulous hope and chill uncertainty.

SHE WAKENED to a morning as perfect as a morning on the Delaware shore can be. The heat continued to rival that of July. The ocean, rolling in gently, was brilliantly blue. It was ideal weather for a last swim. Recalling, and deciding to accept Jerry's invitation to go swimming with him, Jocelyn confined her breakfast to orange juice and coffee. She would say good-by to him on the beach. A good-by was a must. To slip away without a word smacked of the dramatic, and was uncalled for.

She had no quarrel with Jerry. He was not to blame for being an ordinary young man, lacking in sensitivity. It was not his fault that, in her effort to recapture the past, she had confused him with David. Jerry had not even known.

It was still early and she had time before eleven o'clock to pack most of her clothes. Then she slipped into her white bathing suit, threw a beach towel over her shoulders and took the bathers' elevator downstairs.

The day was even warmer than she had thought. She emerged from the cool shaded hotel into dazzling hot sunshine. There was only one umbrella on the beach, a huge orange-and-green one, that she concluded must be Jerry's. She headed for it, blinking against the brightness of the sun on sand and sea.

She rounded the big sunshade with a "Hiya," and stopped short.

There were two persons seated where only one should be, and they both looked at her. One was Jerry. The other was a girl. Good looking, if you like them tall, cool and blonde.

As Jerry's description came back to her, Jocelyn knew with intuitive certainty that the girl was Claudia Hewlitt. Dismay welled up in her, gathering force. It was not that she was disturbed by finding Claudia with Jerry. It was her own predicament that struck her like a blow, as soon as the full significance of the situation penetrated.

Eager and ready as she was to get away from the Blue Hen, to leave now would look like flight. Anyone who knew the circumstances—Neil Marriot, particularly—could not help but believe there was a connection between her departure and Caludia's arrival. The timing must have been the work of some fiendish genie.

Jerry unfolded himself from the sand, his face a study in apprehensive embarrassment. He introduced the two girls, mumblingly. "Miss Hewlitt, Miss Starr. Jocelyn, I've told you about Claudia. She's—er . . ."

CLAUDIA tapped him on a bare ankle with her sun glasses. "Go ahead," she said brightly and commandingly. "I don't

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mind people knowing that we're engaged. I made it plain to mamma before coming down here that we were going to announce our engagement as soon as we got back."

She turned to Jocelyn wearing a smile like a mask "Do sit down," she urged. "Jerry may have told you about me, but I didn't even know that there were any younger people left over at the hotel. Do you live here the year 'round?"

"No," Jocelyn said. She sat down unwillingly. "I just had an idea that the beach might be fun when it wasn't crowded."

She decided against announcing that she was leaving that afternoon. It might look less as if she were being chased away by Jerry's fiancée if she stayed out the week as she had intended.

Claudia eyed her with interest that bordered on insolence. "Didn't you have fun this summer?" she asked. "Didn't you meet anyone amusing?"

Jerry broke in heartily. "I'll say she did. She and Neil Marriot were like this." He held up two fingers close together. His attempt to link her to Neil instead of himself, Jocelyn thought, was blatant to the point of the ridiculous.

"I know Neil Marriot. He belongs to the same club as my father," Claudia said. Her tone implied that this connection gave her a certain proprietorship. "In fact," she went on, "I saw him just yesterday, lunching at the club with Dad."

Jocelyn tensed. "Did he . . .?" she began eagerly and stopped in sudden confusion.

"Mention you?" Claudia's smile was infuriatingly pitying. "Not a word."

"Did you tell him that you were coming down here?" Jerry asked the question that Jocelyn had wanted to ask.

"I don't remember," Claudia said unsatisfyingly.

Jocelyn had had enough of conversational fencing. She scrambled to her feet. "I'm going for a swim," she said, fastening the strap of her bathing cap beneath her chin. "Anybody coming?"

She did not wait for a reply, but behind her she heard Claudia say in a voice that she knew was intended to reach her ears: "Go with her, darling. She's still a hotel guest and one of your charges, isn't she? I'll watch."

Jocelyn continued on her way and, a minute later, heard Jerry's feet padding on the sand after her. She plunged into the water and came out of a dive through a breaker to find him at her side. She blinked salt water out of her eyes, not looking at him.

I GUESS you're surprised," he said, seemed to feel some apology was needed. "I know I was. Claudia's coming, I mean. I hadn't heard she was even back in the States. She just got back Sunday and popped down here. I'd have warned you if I'd known."

"Warned me about what?" she asked

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coldly. "Why shouldn't she pop down here when she feels like it? Her father owns the hotel and you're engaged to her."

Then, before he could muster a reply, she made a second dive and came up in smooth water, beyond the breakers. Jerry had dived with her and continued to stay close, but Jocelyn set a swift swimming pace that precluded the waste of breath on words.

Heading back, reaching the shallows where they could stand, he made one more attempt at a fumbling explanation.

"I wasn't sure until today that Claudia and I were engaged," he said. "It was one of those on again, off again affairs. Her mother doesn't like me, it seems."

Jocelyn contented herself by saying with a glance, instead of with her tongue, Can you blame her?

"The point is," Jerry went on in a hang-dog voice, "I'm sorry for the mix-up, and I hope you're not feeling too badly. I wouldn't want you all upset."

Heartbroken, Jocelyn thought. That would always be his conviction. His and the rest of the world's. It would be Neil's conviction. If Claudia had not told him yesterday that she was coming to Delaware, he would hear later. They moved in interlocking circles. Whatever she herself might say, would sound like a fabrication to save her pride. It would not be worth the saying.

Sadly, she gave up her plan of picking up her telephone that night and announcing cheerfully, "Hi! I'm back in town . . ."

She walked back up the beach with Jerry to get her robe which she had left under the beach umbrella. Claudia stood up as they approached.

"You're a good swimmer, Miss Starr," she said in a patronizing tone. Then, turning to Jerry, she decided, "We'd better have an early lunch. I'm starving. Will you join us, Miss Starr?"

She tossed the invitation out like an after-thought. Jocelyn refused it with what dignity she could.

"Thank you, but my appetite isn't yet up to lunch."

Up in her room, she telephoned the airport to make sure there would be space for her on the three o'clock flight. Since Neil was bound to hear and misinterpret what had happened, there was no point in lingering on at the hotel, a lost soul. In New York she would have work to distract her. Work and Pippin.

A PICTURE of herself, a lone girl with a Siamese cat, brought tears to her eyes. She dashed them away childishly with the back of her hand and resumed packing. At one o'clock, she was finished, her bags locked. The hour and a half, ninety long minutes, that she must wait before starting for the airport loomed up, interminable. She reached for the telephone to order lunch. She was not hungry, but it might help to pass the time.

Her hand was stayed by a knock on the door—not a maid's or bellboy's tap, but a sharp peremptory knock. She opened the door wonderingly, and then backed up, speechless. She, at first, had no voice to bring out the name that formed in her heart and rose to her lips.

"Neil. *Neil!*"

He came into the room, unhurriedly, and pushed the door shut behind him. Gray eyes steady on her small white face, he smiled his slow smile and it had never been more winning. She took a long breath. She had to hold tight to herself to keep from throwing herself into his arms and crying out her joy and her despair.

"Hi, darling, don't look so scared." After what seemed an hour but could have been no more than seconds, Neil spoke in a tenderly amused voice. Then, looking around, he nodded with approval at her bags, obviously ready for travel. "Nice work," he said. "We can get off without stalling."

"Off where?" Jocelyn heard herself asking stupidly.

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Neil's smile came back to her. "I gather you're planning to fly to New York. Right or wrong?" She made no attempt at answering, and he went on. "But you could be persuaded, couldn't you, to drive up with me—especially since I've driven all the way down here to get you?"

"Neil, why are you here?" She took a quick step toward him, small hands clenched in an agony of humiliation. "I won't have it. You heard that Claudia Hewlitt was coming down. That's why you're here."

"Well, maybe," he admitted, his face becoming puzzled and unsure. "Does her coming matter so much?"

"You should know it does," she told him fiercely.

He had come out of pity, she thought. Humiliation grew and knotted painfully within her. Neil's next words did not help.

"I don't understand," he said. "I had a notion—a wrong one, it seems—that you'd welcome me with a smile if not a kiss, and be glad of an excuse to get away from here. I've known Claudia since she was a pigtailed brat. She can make things pretty unpleasant for anyone she suspects of poaching on her private preserves."

I CAN take care of myself," she said thinly. "And even though you've been kind enough to make the long drive down here, I prefer to go back by plane."

"You little fool!" He drew himself up to his full lean height. The pity was now naked and contemptuous in his eyes and in his voice. "So you weren't kidding yourself. I was kidding myself. You went overboard for Blake—all the way. And like a dope I thought there was a chance for me!"

He laughed harshly at himself.

"Neil . . ." Jocelyn's voice reflected her confusion. "I don't care about Claudia being here, because of Jerry. I'd planned to leave here before she came, although you won't believe that."

"Why shouldn't I?" He seemed surprised. "According to our good manager, Mr. Gleason, you made plans for leaving last night."

"How did he know? I haven't checked out."

Neil shrugged. "When I asked for you a few minutes ago, he told me he thought you were getting ready to leave. Maybe he's a mind reader. Or—didn't you send a telegram? Something about a cat?"

A small, shaky laugh bubbled up in her throat. Heaven bless and preserve Pippin! "I did, I did!" she cried. "It was ghastly here yesterday—everything was. Impossible!" She did not need to include Jerry, by name, in the everything. "And I hadn't heard, either, that Claudia was coming. That's true too."

"Why not?" he asked mildly. "I talked to Claudia at lunch yesterday. Maybe she or Blake told you. I got the impression that she did not like Jerry staying down here when he could have come to New York and done what paper work he had to do. She was apparently intending to descend upon him unannounced."

"And did," Jocelyn said. "But everything's all right with them."

"Then why on earth . . ." Neil stopped close to her and seized her by the shoulders. ". . . won't you come home with me?"

Home with me!

The phrase sang in Jocelyn's heart. Her body, swiftly and wonderfully, became weak under the touch of his hands.

"I will," she whispered. Then, out of a last surge of stubborn pride, she insisted, "But I won't have you feeling sorry for me."

"Feeling sorry for you?" He pulled her to him. "Why should I feel sorry for a girl who's got me head over heels in love with her. I've been told that I've got the makings of a good husband. I'll love you and . . !"

She put her arms around him and smiled up at him. Everything was all right now.

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# Backdoor to Paradise

By JANE BLAKE

**Somewhere, Ted took the wrong turn and Barbara's road to happiness became a journey to heartbreak.**

It was raining when she got off the bus in town, and the evening wind drove the rain with slanted fury against the thin dress she wore. She had not dressed for rain.

It had been her best dress—green to spark the color in her eyes—but now she wanted to be free of it, of all it symbolized, just as she wanted to be removed from this day which had begun with such fine promise and had turned into this night of bleak despair.

Walking from the bus depot she held her young head high in the rain, grateful that the downpour hid her tears. Her breath came short, in uneven gasps across her teeth, and she wondered if she would ever be able to control the sobs that shook her. In the bus, on the lonely, bitter journey home, she had held her handkerchief before her face, biting into the soft wad it had become; but here on the streets of the town she could only try to clamp her lips stiffly against the pain of the heartache which she carried within her.

The lights of a roadside diner swam up before her, looming like swollen insects in the night. On a sudden decision she went inside and ordered coffee, hoping that the scalding liquid would still the trembling in her throat. She felt better when she had finished it, but it was not a complete recovery by any means.

"You all right?" the countergirl asked.

And Barbara said yes, of course, she was all right. She was surprised to discover that her voice did not come apart or shatter into brittle little pieces. "I'm—I just got a chill," she said with a desperate half-smile.

Outside, she counted the street lights, and the cracks in the slick-shined sidewalk; she added mentally the numbers of the houses as she walked along—anything to keep her mind occupied and away from what had happened.

A car going quickly through the rain whizzed by her at an intersection and she leaped back to the curb. And, in that moment, when the sudden fear rose up into her throat, she felt the similar emotion—the lightheadedness, the tumultous beating of her heart—and she was back into the afternoon . . .

"Ted," she said, before she could catch herself. "Ted!"



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*"Run, Ted!" she screamed. This man is from the police."*



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BUT THERE was no Ted now to gather her in his arms and tell her she was being just a little fool, a silly emotional girl who wasn't the least bit practical. There was only the drumming rain, rising over the sound of the fading tire whine. Just the wet night and her cold, shivering self, returning into the terrible emptiness of here and now, on the corner of Summer Street, her street, and the saffron street lamps lighting her way home.

She had not expected to see this place so soon again. She remembered with cutting clarity how Ted had given his car the final burst of speed this afternoon right at this very corner, laughing, making her laugh with him.

"Say good-by, baby. We're shaking this town," he told her almost fiercely. "Nothing but first-class from now on."

And she had felt the wonderful release, like nothing she had ever known before, unless it was like the awesome breathlessness of loving Ted, the fine, warm pleasure of having his arm hold her close as they drove swiftly into the future. It was their moment, that infinitely sweet and strangely frightening instant when they had but to race a little bit to catch up with their dreams . . .

She could remember, too, the long, delicious nights out on the Point, where Ted and she had counted stars and he had promised, "We'll make it, baby. Soon as old man Cranston comes through with that raise, we'll be all set!"

And how she had argued against waiting to marry. "We're all set now, darling. I can go on working for a while."

His dark head had moved from side to side, his darker eyes flashed. The lean young face was set like granite. "My wife won't work in any five and dime store, Barbara."

So they had left it like that, until somehow he had arranged the miracle. Without the slightest warning, he had come into the store this morning, waving the license at her. They were going down to Cartersville, he said, quick as she could get ready.

Eloping!

On the way Ted had explained about the sudden wealth that had come to him. There was a great deal of money, hundreds of dollars. "A bonus from Cranston." Ted's smile lighted his face like a flame. "There's nothing to stop us now, Barbara!"

Nothing—until the excitement dimmed long enough for logic to take over. On the long ride to Cartersville, she began to think more rationally. About Mr. Cranston, and the bonus, and Ted's remark about shaking this town for good. And the suspicions had begun to plague her . . .

MISS TURNER?"

The voice reached out to her through the sound of the rain. She was back on Summer Street in front of her rooming house, watching a small, heavy-set man coming toward her. He touched one finger of his right hand to his Western style hat, making a rather friendly gesture of the salute.

"Police Department," he said, showing her a badge. "Detective Masterson."

Barbara stiffened, struck speechless.

"Where is he?" The small man removed his hat and rubbed one hand across his silver gray hair. "You might as well tell me. It'll save a lot of trouble."

"I don't know what you're talking about." She started for the stairs.

"Just a minute," he said, the tone harsher than it had been, but with still a reserve of kindliness. "I know it's not very comfortable out here in the rain, Miss Turner. But I've got to ask these questions about Ted Stone . . ."

"No!" She broke away and ran up the steps. By the time she reached the second floor, Masterson had overtaken her. He waited calmly while she used the key and opened her door, then he pushed it wide and motioned her inside.

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"Miss Turner, there are lots of times I don't like my job. I don't like to get young folks in trouble, but somehow—well, the trouble's already there, and it's my job to straighten it out. Now, if you want to go into the bathroom and change to dry clothes, that's all right. I'll wait," he said. "But make up your mind, you're going to have to talk to me sooner or later."

When she had changed and come back into her room, he was seated, his hat in his lap, near the door which he had left open.

"Theodore NMI Stone," the detective read from a card. " 'Age twenty-four. Five-eleven, one hundred and sixty pounds, dark brown hair, brown eyes, no distinguishing scars or birthmarks. No known relatives. Occupation: automobile mechanic. Came to town two years ago, worked for Cranston Garage almost all that time. Three days ago, took out a wedding license for himself and Barbara Mae Turner, local salesgirl. Age twenty-two, five feet four, one hundred and nine pounds, black hair, gray eyes. Only daughter William and Jennifer Turner, deceased.' "

He looked up at her. "We checked the churches, the courts and the justices of the peace. You weren't married there today, though you and Stone drove to Cartersville, arriving at three-thirty p.m. You took the bus back at four, alone. Why?"

"Please," she begged, trying not to re-create the afternoon, the torture of her parting with Ted. It was done and over with, now.

The detective droned, "Roger Cranston, owner of Cranston's Garage, filed complaint this afternoon. He and Stone had another argument about salary this morning. Stone quit. Then, according to Cranston's complaint, Stone disappeared—with five hundred dollars of the Garage's money."

He gave me a bonus, darling. Can you imagine that old skinflint coming through like that?

Ted, she thought, how could you have done it? How could you have thought that could ever be a life for us? Running, running, trying to lose ourselves someplace . . .

I love you, baby. Remember that. Always remember that.

But with the disappointment, and the thick feeling inside of her she could remember nothing but his admission when she had finally made him admit to her suspicions:

"All right, I took it. Sure. The old skinflint had it coming. He knew I wanted the raise to get married on." His laughter—reckless, uncertain, impatient. "Baby, I don't want to wait any longer. We got to get married—get started on our own. I can find another job, a better job, somewhere else . . ."

"You found out about his taking the money," Masterson guessed correctly, "and you left him. You took the bus back here. Now, where did he go?"

"I don't know," Barbara said.

"We checked Cartersville. He's not there. Where do you think he might have gone. Surely, he said something . . ."

"I tell you, I don't know!"

"Look, I know you got a rough deal. You loved the guy. But this is grand larceny, and the longer we work, the tougher it's going to be. For everybody concerned. For you, particularly. You think things can't get any worse than they are now?"

He laughed grimly, rose and pushed the chair away. He made a whip of his voice. "Let me tell you what to expect, Miss Turner. First the charge—accessory to grand larceny. Then the weeks in jail, waiting for trial. Then the prosecutor convincing a jury that you and Stone engineered this thing together, that you ran away together and then split up for safety sake. And if Stone isn't apprehended, you can bet your boots the prosecution will ask for that much stiffer sentence for you."

"No!" she cried. "I didn't steal anything!"

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Masterson shrugged. "Get your coat. We'll make out the warrant downtown."

"Leave her alone!" a voice said. "She had nothing to do with this."

Ted stood in the doorway, his face flushed, his dark eyes flashing. The first shock of seeing him there weakened her legs and she almost stumbled as she moved swiftly toward him.

"Ted!" she screamed. "Run! This man is from the police!" And she tried to throw herself in front of Masterson, to block his way to the door and Ted.

"Easy, baby," Ted said, catching her. He held her away from him, but his hands on her arms tightened almost unbearably, and she expected to hear the crash of a gun in the detective's hand.

Nothing happened. Masterson merely said, "I'm glad you came back, Stone."

But Ted was looking only at her. "Barbara, it's no good without you. No good at all. I love you, Barbara. I had to see you once again." His face grew bleak. "Whatever happens, I had to tell you how wrong I was. Selfish—foolish—taking you into the kind of life that would have destroyed us both. You were right, Barbara, so right. Stealing Cranston's dough wasn't any way to start. I was acting like a crazy kid. I love you. I had to tell you that."

Then she was listening no longer. She was in the circle of his arms, crushing herself against his chest, drawing strength from the nearness of him. She whispered, "Ted, darling," finding his lips with her own, holding him fiercely, as if she could protect him.

Ted said, "When you left me, I went and had a drink—and thought things over. Then I got in the car and drove back here. I never did manage to catch up with the bus, though. I called old man Cranston, but he wasn't home. So I left the money at the Garage with the night man."

"Ted! You gave it back!" She felt as if a great weight had been lifted from her.

"I took the money for us. But there wasn't any more us. Not then . . ." Ted looked at Masterson. "Not now." He drew away from her. "Any time you say," he told the detective, "we can get this over with. But not Barbara. She's not in on this. It was all *my* damn fool idea."

For a long moment the detective said nothing, watching them. He put on his hat. "Like I said before, Miss Turner. Sometimes I don't like my job. But there are other times, when you see some young folks—young folks in love, who haven't been thinking very straight—and well, you just want to help them out. Stone here isn't the worst man in the world. Neither is Cranston. If he's got his money back, he should be satisfied. At any rate, I can talk to him. But we'll all have to go downtown."

He saw the anger in Ted's face, the fear in Barbara's, and he smiled. "Really, Miss Turner, don't worry. Worst we may have to do is put this young fool on probation. In your custody."

Downstairs Masterson said abruptly, "If you've still got that license, I think I know a night court judge who can be persuaded to perform the ceremony. Free."

She could scarcely believe it. "Darling, did you hear that!"

Ted shook his head. "But, Barbara, I don't even have a job . . ."

Masterson chuckled. "Young fellow, you'd be surprised the things I can do for mechanics in this man's town." He winked at Ann. "Provided I'm his best man, of course."

They drove through the thrumming rain, down the street that only a short time ago she had hated to come back to. Only now, with her hand in Ted's, Barbara did not mind it in the least. She saw the street lamps winking in at them, flashing across Ted's face, lighting the relief there, and she snuggled closer to him. It was still their moment, she thought. They had not lost it, after all. This time they were really going first-class—all the way.

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## PROPOSAL

*I've waited many months for this,*
*I've planned this moment, dear,*
*Though you have led a merry dance*
*Throughout this busy year,*
*I knew there'd come a time when your*
*Resistance would give way,*
*When asking me to marry you*
*Would be the thing to say.*

*I know the moment has arrived,*
*I've learned to read your eyes,*
*I only hope that now I can*
*Show just the right surprise!*

*—Catherine E. Berry*

## CHECKMATED

*They've found a way*
*To measure the moon,*
*Rocket to Mars,*
*Sail a balloon,*

*Prism sunlight,*
*Cocoon silk,*
*Split the atom,*
*Spindle milk,*

*Wing a message*
*Through the air—*
*Darling, magic*
*Is everywhere. . . .*

*But despite*
*All cunning art*
*ONLY YOU*
*Can fill my heart.*

*—Gladys Martin*



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*"Darcy," he said soberly, "I hope this won't hurt you."*



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By

SUSAN WOOD

# Say It Sweet

**. . . when you tell a girl you love her—even if you don't mean it.**

DARCEY CLOSED the door gently, but her fingers itched to slam it with a resounding whack in Mr. Mew's face. She took a deep breath and her anger simmered down to a gentle, steady boil.

"Lucify," she muttered indignantly. When Mr. Mervin Mew wanted to take an employee down a peg, he not only used all the words in Webster's dictionary, he invented his own.

The whole conversation echoed in her ears. Mr. Mew's nasally effeminate voice had enunciated with ever so slight a lisp, "Miss Ford, in proportion, our San Francisco branch is not on a par with the New York or Washington, D. C. stores. With the help of Mr. Dillon I am launching a purification campaign in each department. Now while our advertising has been adequate, adequacy is not enough. Not for Mew's."

With a little imagination, Darcy could picture Mr. Mew singing "Dear Old Mew's," as if the department store were an ivy-covered alma mater. Then his expression had changed from fanaticism to annoyance. "You can expect an advertising expert, highly recommended by our eastern Mew's, Marion Travis, to help you lucify and sublimate our," he hesitated and looked pained, then said, "copy, I believe it is?"

"But Mr. Mew," she had demurred, choking down the treasonous words she had almost spoken. If Mr. Mew would keep his pudgy white fingers out of the pie, maybe . . . But what was the use?

Mr. Mew had gone on as if she had never spoken. "And so, we expect your complete cooperation. That's all, Miss Ford."

That's all, Miss Ford, she fumed. After all the hours she had given her job. Evenings spent in study. Days under grueling tension. From clerk, to stenographer, to secretary, and finally to the mahogany desk that she had more than earned.

She pushed open her door with rage-shaken fingers, pausing to scan her own little office. This was hers and no chic, knife-in-the-back Marion Travis was going to steal it. It wasn't that she was wedded to her job, but she needed the cash for a dream.

She collapsed in her swivel chair behind the desk and passed a hand over her forehead. What next? She would call Les, her coach in business matters. Les Dillon was Mr. Mew's assistant, and the man she loved. She lifted the phone and asked for his office.

"Dillon speaking." Les's low voice warmed her.

"It's Darcy, Les. I'm so upset about Mr. Mew's new bug." She hated it, but her voice shook.



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"Not over the phone, Darcy." Les warned. "I'll drop by later. You've got to go through with it, though. Just be calm."

SHE DROPPED the phone gently on the receiver. Calm—even Les's voice was calming. For years she had watched him, promotion by promotion, go to the top with herself, his apt pupil, less spectacularly behind him. With each promotion she had expected marriage and been disappointed. Not that Les could help it. But soon . . .

How soon? Darcy didn't know. But she was beginning to hate skulking around in corners, meeting at obscure cafes, hiding the love she should wear like a badge, and calling him Mr. Dillon at work. All because Mr. Mew disliked inter-office romance.

Then she flushed ashamedly. This constant striving was getting her down. She knew full well what was the matter with Les. Certainly she knew. Hadn't they discussed evening after evening their plans for a little shop on Sutter Street? Their own shop. Small but smart.

With guilty color high on her cheekbones, Darcy bent to the layout charts on her desk and, clutching her blue pencil, went to work with venom.

"Ahem . . ."

Darcy heard a deep baritone bid for attention. Her eyes swept across her desk. Without looking up she could see two masculine hands resting lightly on the glass. Large, but finely moulded hands with long tapered fingers. Slowly her eyes traveled up over an expanse of brown gabardine. Broad shoulders supported a well set head with a crest of crisply waving black hair. She gulped. Seldom did the advertising department at Mew's have a visitor like this.

"Yes?" her voice lifted with inquiry.

"Marion Travis," he stated matter-of-factly. "Miss Ford, I presume." Two blue eyes regarded her from under generous dark brows. A friendly, almost rakish grin twitched at the corners of his mouth.

"Well," Darcy said breathlessly.

"Well what?" One dark brow traveled upward.

"I thought you were a woman," she burst out, and then could have bitten her tongue off. How girlish she sounded! Les would simply hate this. After all his patient training in changing her from a silly romantic girl to a poised business woman. She grabbed for her composure, reminding herself that this was the person who wanted to ease her out of her job. Man or woman. Handsome or homely.

"Please sit down, Mr. Travis." Les would like this attitude. Cool. Assured.

"CALL ME Marion," he advised. "By the way, Marion with an 'on' is masculine. English mother, you know." He waved a hand as if that settled it and drew up a chair. "Now we get to know each other, Doris."

"Darcy," she corrected, and suddenly, inexplicably, she couldn't meet his eyes, concentrating instead on the cleft in his square chin.

"Darcy," he repeated. When he said it, the homely little nickname sounded quaintly right. Her mind wandered ever so slightly.

"And now to business," he reminded her, with just a mite of brusqueness. "I've been studying your work for weeks now, ever since Mervin Mew asked me to come out and give a hand. First of all, I want to compliment you. Your copy is clever, original, and it certainly hasn't been dashed off. You're doing one great job."

Darcy's eyes widened. An unexpected turn of events indeed! The depressed feeling she had had for days, caused by a combination of Les's disappointment in her and Mr. Mew's interference, ebbed somewhat. Her heart lightened. A little praise can be a heady drink.

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"But there's something missing, Darcy," he went on, "and it's the one ingredient you can't do without. It's hard to explain. In the East we call it schmaltz." He stopped and ran a hand through his black hair. "What I'm trying to say is that your stuff hasn't got that sentiment, that romance. It's too clever," he said. "Too detached."

She gasped and then was silent. Why argue with him? Sentiment was something she just couldn't ever handle. She shied away from it whenever possible. Sophistication was her forte. Why not admit it? She turned to him, her brown eyes looking directly into his blue ones. "I've suspected that. Can you help me?"

He thought a moment. "I don't know. It's such an intangible thing. If it's there, it's there. If not . . ." He broke off, walked to the window, and looked out over teeming Market Street. Finally he asked, "How long have you been slaving at these salt mines?"

"Five years," she answered dully. "This means my job, Marion, and I need it." Without her salary Les couldn't hold out long at the Sutter Street shop. Not long enough to get a clientele. They had to make out. It was their only chance to escape Mr. Mew's tyranny and interference. Her only chance to have a normal marriage with Les.

"Five years, and you mean to tell me no one has ever snapped you up yet? With that hair and those eyes—even the way you've camouflaged them?"

DARCY SLID off her tortoise shell glasses and laid them on the desk. They were obliquely glamourous and Les approved, but they were so heavy on her tiny nose. The nose she had almost forgotten people used to call piquant. She passed a hand over the golden brown hair she had so patiently trained to go in a smooth roll. Even so, little tendrils of wayward curls would ease out shamelessly over her forehead and the nape of her neck.

Snapped me up, she asked herself inwardly. No, no one had. Although Les had come to an understanding with her, one couldn't call it snapping up. She wouldn't be lying if she didn't tell Marion about Les. Les wouldn't like it.

"No," she said simply. "No one."

"Hm, curious." he said. "Well, let's go over these layouts and I'll show you what I mean."

They bent, heads together, over the charts on her desk. Marion went to work swiftly on Darcy's copy. He didn't slash; he didn't mutilate. Just a word here and a phrase there, all the time explaining, and simplifying.

Darcy watched and listened, awestruck. Mr. Mew had been right for once when he called Marion an expert. Even that was an understatement. He was a positive genius.

He said finally, "Here are two new plugs. Angel Cut Hair Do and Criere's Cocktail Gowns. A blurb for each, please."

Darcy thought for a moment. "How about, 'Want to be an angel?' "

"Nope. More schmaltz, angel." Marion's voice was gently impatient.

Darcy bit her lip and concentrated. Where, oh where were those rose-colored glasses she used to wear a few years back? "Well then, 'Snip your way into his heart?' " she faltered.

"Oh brother, enough is plenty. Get your hat and let's go."

"Go?" she echoed blankly.

"It's dark out. Look." He pointed out the window through which she could see the chill San Francisco night with its wispy spirals of fog slipping by. "Mew promised me you would show me San Francisco tonight," he explained jauntily, wearing a look of exaggerated innocence.

"That was nice of Mr. Mew." Darcy retorted tartly, swift anger exploding within her. There must be some mistake. She had a few rights left. "Excuse me," she said suddenly. "I'll be right back."

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DARCY RUSHED out into the corridor, past the credit department, past Mr. Mew's sanctum and burst through a sedate door neatly lettered with gold leaf: *Lester Dillon, Manager.*

Les raised his smooth glinting blond head, and his brows went together in a sign of annoyance. Darcy ignored the sign for the first time.

"That Marion Travis claims Mr. Mew promised him I would show him the town tonight," Darcy practically hissed the words.

"Well, why not?" Les's expression was incredulous. "What's wrong with that?"

Darcy's heart plummeted down to her black suede pumps. She loved him so. Why couldn't he be resentful, annoyed, maybe a little jealous? But what other stand did she expect him to take? She might have known his attitude. He was so practical—and so reliable.

"Oh, Les, don't you see?" she almost pleaded. "It's not prudishness. I just don't want to go." I just want to spend the evening with you proudly, as any other woman in love, her eyes told him.

He withdrew his gaze as if she had offended his sensibilities. "We haven't got a date tonight and there's no reason why you shouldn't go. As I told you this afternoon, there are some things you just have to accept. We're working people now." His expression softened and he walked over to her. "I'll be up tomorrow night. I have something very important to tell you. Something to change our lives, Darcy."

Something he wanted to tell her. Maybe this was it! Surprisingly she felt little elation. She was too tired. Tomorrow. Tomorrow she would be thrillingly happy.

"Oh, and Darcy," Les's low voice called after her, "be a little more discreet, will you, dear? It won't be for long."

Not for long. How many times had she heard that Darcy mused drearily as she walked back to her own office.

Marion was waiting for her with his feet propped up on her wastebasket and her sheared beaver coat over his lap.

"What's the word?" he asked as she came into the room.

"You know what it is," she answered sourly, and grabbed her coat. Then she calmed down a bit. Why take it out on Marion?

"I wonder who's done this to you." He grinned wickedly. "Well, it's never too late for reforming. Come on!"

"WHERE TO?" she asked when they reached the street. "We can walk to Chinatown from here and then take the cable car. However, if you want to go to Fisherman's Wharf we'd better take a streetcar . . ."

"Now, don't get excited, and start managing things. That's the trouble with you. You've developed into a first rate manager. Absolute death to sentiment. Be vague, please. Let's just ride around a bit."

He guided her over to a little black coupe sitting at the curb in front of Mew's. "Step in, angel, and we'll be off," he commanded good-naturedly as he swung the door open.

Darcy leaned back against the car cushions and closed her eyes a minute. She tried to plan an itinerary, finally deciding they should start at the Presidio and work around it.

"Why so silent?" he asked her.

She opened her eyes and then quickly shut them. He was darting the car dizzily in and out of the heavy Market Street traffic. She reopened them just in time to see him skillfully dodge an ancient streetcar and turn up McAllister Street. She breathed again and said, in a series of little gasps. "I'm trying—to think what you'd like to—see first."

"Well don't, just relax. I'll drive and you be charming. First schmaltz lesson."

She took his advice and leaned back again, watching the pastel houses flying by. He drove across the Golden Gate Bridge

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and they were on their way, heading into the bald purple hills of Marin County.

Darcy sighed contentedly. This wouldn't be such a bad evening after all. Imperceptibly the pointless hurt she had felt at Les seemed to be fading away and she began to feel better.

Marion practically entertained himself. She stole a look at him. His lips were pursed in a noiseless whistle; his hair was whipped by the wind into a mass of boyish curls. He looked so young, that she herself felt young. Then she came to with a start. Twenty four wasn't ancient.

The car sped on. She expected him any minute to turn around and head for the city lights. He kept going though, through the little towns that dotted the highway.

Finally she said, "Don't you think we'd better head back? I hate to be vulgar, but I'm getting hungry."

"Hold your horses, we're going to eat. Really eat. There's a little roadhouse past San Rafael that puts out one swell dinner."

COMPREHENSION BROUGHT a flush of anger to Darcy's cheeks. "Why you —you opportunist," she flung at him. "You know San Francisco. I should have suspected the way you jockeyed through that traffic. And making me give up an evening to show you the sights!" She stopped, suddenly abashed. Her anger was way out of proportion to the incident. Anger? Or was it panic?

"Ah-hah," he said, in an infuriatingly amused voice. "Just like a woman. You naive and bigoted little thing." He snorted. "Women use lipstick and don't call it deception. Isn't a man entitled to one small white lie to get a date with a very luscious woman?"

Luscious. The word slowed up her thinking, momentarily, but only momentarily. Suddenly she made up her mind. No more hedging. If Les didn't like it, it was too bad. "Look, there's something I haven't told you. I'm engaged to be married."

Marion looked down at her and grinned. "I don't believe it!" he exclaimed. "Think up a better one than that."

"Yes, I am," she insisted, furious that he wouldn't take her seriously. She glanced at his mirth-crinkled profile. What was so funny? She threw caution over her shoulder. "I've been engaged to Lester Dillon, Mr. Mew's manager, for three years." She bit her tongue to refrain from adding a "so there." Why should she be so anxious to show this man that she was desired by someone?

"Three years," he said and whistled. "That's a long time. Well, are you still mad and do you want me to take you back, or shall we be reckless and go on? If you'll remember I took you out on full faith. You told me this afternoon there were no strings on you. Why?"

Darcy debated. Why not? Les had

## TO NO AVAIL

*The wise ones say that love is blind,*
*And now I know the saying's true;*
*You never noticed my new frock,*
*Nor caught the smile I sent to you.*

*And since it seems you never heard*
*The tender words I tried to tell,*
*I think, my dear, your love must be*
*Not merely blind, but deaf as well!*

*—Pauline Booker*

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thrown her at Marion, in a manner of speaking. So why not? "We'll go on," she decided. "I'm hungry. And as you say, it was my fault." Suddenly she felt a need to explain to him. "Les is quite ambitious. We have plans for our own shop, but we need more money. We both have to keep our jobs. Mr. Mew is a bit, well, opinionated, so Les thought it would be smart to keep it quiet for awhile."

"A long while," he corrected. "Well, here we are." He swung his car into the driveway of an unprepossessing roadhouse.

The meal was wonderful. Antipasto, chicken cacciatore, with a side dish of spaghetti and ravioli. Bitter toasted coffee, and then somewhat ridiculously, cherries jubilee.

WHAT AN ending," Darcy sighed, and she giggled a little. "From the sublime to the ridiculous. What am I going to do with this?"

"I always stir it up a bit so as not to hurt Gino's feelings. He's more proud of the dessert than all his perfectly seasoned dishes. Sort of like gilding the lily though, isn't it?"

She agreed and almost purred. She was enjoying Marion now, or maybe the meal had mellowed her. He was, well, not her type at all. That she knew. But some lucky girl would get him some day, and be swept through life on a cloud of light-hearted romance.

I'm more like Les, she reflected sagely. Feet on the ground—that was wrong too. She felt confused; but queerly enough she was enjoying it.

"Let's go," he urged and they stubbed out their cigarettes. They climbed into the car.

"Where to, now?" she asked.

"How about the view at Point Reyes? Have you ever seen it?"

She admitted that she never had.

"Oh, you'll like it, I know. Just the place for proposals. See what I mean? You have to keep your eye on the ball. 'Tis love that makes the wheels of industry spin."

That's right, and what was she thinking, Darcy wondered. Marion was just a business man. What was the matter with her anyway? This deal with Mr. Mew had her all upset.

"On the other hand," he went on, and he grinned wickedly, "going back to your engagement, as a frustrated fiancée you ought to be writing better copy than you've been putting out. Disappointed lovers can put more schmaltz into things than anybody. And greeting card verse! They're wonderful at it. Are you sure you're in love?"

She threw him a look that would have withered anyone else, but he kept smiling, undaunted. "Then you must be very frustrated," she said tartly, ignoring the impertinent question. It was unanswerable anyway. And what right did he have to analyze her feelings?

"Me, frustrated?" he hooted. "No, I was just born with schmaltz. I'm congenitally in love with love. It's a wonderful feeling, Darcy. You ought to climb aboard. Makes a good appeal to the buying public. Mr. Mew would like it. He's very worried about his brothers getting ahead of him. And his debutante daughter, with the horse-face, is doing a good job of tunneling into his bank account."

SHE LAUGHED heartily, in spite of herself. Horse-faced was the word for Dorinda Mew. She pitied her. Sometimes Mr. Mew corralled Les to squire Dorinda. It often upset their plans, but Darcy never minded. After all you couldn't be jealous of that poor thing. She was so determined to be a belle, with so little raw material.

"I see we have one point on which to agree," he said as he ground the car to a stop on a deserted road.

"I don't see anything," she complained. "It just looks like back country to me,"

"Hold your horses," he commanded.

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"Follow me." He helped her out of the car and they walked over the shoulder of the road. A few steps later they came upon the Pacific Ocean, hundreds of feet below them, breaking with roaring noises on the jagged rocks.

"Oh," she breathed, and walked forward savoring the salt tang of the air.

"Be careful, angel, I don't want you to grow wings just yet." His taunting, intimate voice was in her ear, his grasp on her wrist was cautioning. Then, in one swift movement, his arms were around her pulling her to him. His head bent down and his lips were throbbingly warm on hers.

Bewitched by the magic of the night, and a strange compulsion welling up from within her, she succumbed. Her lips softened beneath his, and her arms stole around his neck. They clung to each other.

The faraway honk of a ship's whistle broke the spell. She eased herself out of his arms and stood shivering at the edge of the cliff. Shaken. Confused.

"I'm sorry, Darcy," he murmured. "A little sorry anyway. I shouldn't have taken you by storm that way. But I've wanted to kiss you ever since I saw you sitting behind that desk, a little girl, so soft and feminine, all dressed up to play the brittle career woman."

Darcy bit her lip, but her voice came out surprisingly normal. "Let's not dwell on it, Marion. It was my fault too, for letting myself in for this. After all, it was just a kiss. Let's forget about it."

"And there's where you're wrong. You'll never get pulling quality in your copy that way. That wasn't just a kiss. I don't know about you, but I'll never forget it. You've got to get romance if you want to improve your copy." Marion's voice was warm and urgent, but his words were like a douse of cold water. No wonder he was an expert. Business, even at a time like this!

"Oh, shut up," she said viciously, jabs of pointless anger plaguing her. She brushed by him and got in the car.

"That's the spirit," he quipped blithely and he swung around and headed back to San Francisco.

DARCY SAT remotely silent during the trip. She had inched over as far as possible in the corner. Marion seemed unperturbed and was whistling tunelessly as he drove.

"And where do you live?" he asked as they crossed the bridge.

"Up on the hill. I'll show you." Impersonally, she directed him to her apartment in the shadow of the Coit Tower. He saw her to her door, squeezed her hand once and said, "I'll see you tomorrow, angel. Pleasant dreams."

Darcy threw her coat on a chair and lit a cigarette. She certainly had made a prize fool of herself today. She was getting sick and tired of the whole farce. Why didn't Les marry her and rescue her from mashers like Marion? Then suddenly, she wondered at her instantaneous rejection of the word 'masher.' Marion wasn't a masher. She knew that. He was nice. Very nice. Too nice.

She slipped off her clothes and tied back her hair. She needed sleep if she were going to face a hectic day tomorrow. She had to make out copy, for Les. Angel Cuts and Criere Cocktail Gowns. Also, true love and sentiment, and maybe, very possibly, a proposal—and a solution.

Her last thought before she went to sleep was of Marion. Funny that he should keep his name. It would be so easy to change it to Miles, or, or—no, not Mervin. But then, only a completely masculine person like Marion could afford to carry a name like that around. Certainly no one would dare comment.

Masculine—that was Marion. That was why his kiss had put her in a panic tonight, making her act like a school-girl. Yes, that was the only reason it still burned on her lips. She sighed and fell into an uneasy sleep.

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At five to nine the next morning, Darcy walked briskly into her office, still smarting from the self-inflicted tongue lashing she had gotten at breakfast. She had called herself sundry names from skittish to downright daft. Marion was breaking his neck to be helpful and joke her out of her glooms. She had made a fool of herself last night by picking up an imagined insult like that. After all, she was engaged to Les. Today she was going to cooperate if it killed her.

She hung her hat and coat in the closet and smoothed down her dark green jersey jumper. She sat down and shuffled the papers on her desk.

The clock hands crept around to ten, then to eleven. Still no Marion. At first she idly wondered where he was, then she found herself watching the clock more than the papers. In vain she tried to regain her serenity.

AT ELEVEN-TWENTY she stared at the clock, hypnotized, jumping guiltily at Marion's cheerful interruption. "Ah, a clock watcher," he chided. "There's hope for you, then. I had begun to despair."

"Hello. If I'm a clock watcher, you're a slacker. Fine time to report to work." She marveled at the comradeship in her voice. That talking-to she gave herself this morning got some results after all.

"Okay, let's go," he answered energetically, flinging his hat on the desk and collapsing in a chair. "Let's go. Angel Cuts first, and put some schmaltz in it."

Angel Cuts. Angel—luscious angel. A smile curved up Darcy's mouth, and her eyes became dreamy. "How about, 'Be his angel, tonight?'" Why was her voice so husky, she wondered.

"Darcy!" His eyes widened and he tipped back his chair. "Well, that might have been a flash in the pan. Try the cocktail gowns." He was joking, but she could see a faint glint of approval in his eyes.

"Well then, 'Gowns to bring a catch in his heart,' or perhaps, 'A gown you'll press your cheek against—just remembering.'"

His chair came down with a bang. "Schmaltz," he cried. "You've got it. Maybe even too much. You might start crying over soap operas." His grin was huge. Suddenly he sobered. He leaned over the desk and placed his hand on her shoulder. "Darcy, Darcy, I hope this won't hurt you. When you get sentiment, and I do believe you have it, you're vulnerable."

"Don't worry," she assured him. "I may be vulnerable, but I'll still have my job." Her tone was normal, but beneath it all she felt one big question. How, why, and who all rolled up in one. Today she was different.

"Darcy," His voice became clinically grim. "You mean you set that much store by being one of advertising's bright young ladies?"

She said nothing. What could she say? That this was a stopgap measure. That she hated it? Which she did.

He leaned back in his chair again and regarded her with half-closed eyes. "Angel Cut . ." he murmured, half to himself. "That would sure set you off." He leaned across the desk, almost absently, and twitched at the rolled hair. Instantly a wayward ringlet, full of spirit, popped loose at Darcy's temple.

"It bit me," Marion complained.

"Serves you right," she commented, but delicious warm tingles were edging up her spine.

SEE. SECOND LESSON. You've got to sample the wares you're trying to sell. For instance . . ." he said as he shuffled the papers on the desk. "Here." He held up a pen and ink sketch of one of the featured cocktail gowns. Black velvet, low cut, with a practically non-existent strap holding it up. Sheer bewitchery.

"On you, terrific. And I know you must have beautiful arms." He grinned. "Say, speaking of love, when are you and the boy wonder uniting?"

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That chill note dashed all Darcy's frivolity. "I don't know," she said slowly, spacing each word.

Marion's eyes hardened momentarily. He pulled his chair closer to hers. He opened his mouth as if to speak, hesitated, then in a gruff voice said, "Well, I digress. Let's get back to work."

They slaved all afternoon, but enjoyed themselves, in spite of the work. Les looked in once, and at a bad time, too. Marion had just made a joke about Mr. Mew and they were both laughing like a pair of demented hyenas. Les frowned, smiled, nodded, and backed out.

At precisely five thirty Marion stood up and grabbed his hat. "Time to quit. See you, angel."

Through the open door, she watched him leave, watched him nod pleasantly to the girls. Then she walked to the closet and hauled out her coat. She would stop at a drugstore for a snack in order to be ready for Les at eight o'clock. Les always called at eight.

The meal was passable, but she hardly knew what she ate. When she finished, she slid a coin under her coffee cup, and started walking up the steep hill to her apartment.

The cold night air was bracing; there was a lilt to it. She looked about her, as if for the first time. She became aware of each person who passed her as a person. She looked, almost avidly, in the store windows, at the seductive gowns displayed.

Halfway up the hill she saw a young couple headed down, arm in arm. They were laughing uproariously at themselves. Laughing at the ludicrous positions they had to take to brake themselves against the steep descent.

Normally, she would have given them one glance and sniffed disdainfully. But not tonight. There was something so familiar about them. The fellow from a distance looked very much like Marion, and the girl . . . Suddenly Darcy averted her head and crossed the street to avoid them.

That girl could have been her double a few years back. The cropped curly hair, flying carelessly, the gleaming eyes, the fresh color of excitement high on her cheekbones.

DARCY brought her mind back to well-traveled channels. Tonight Les might propose. He might, because he had been acting different lately. She hadn't seen much of him. She thought of the look he had given Marion and herself this afternoon. Why, he might be jealous, she thought exultantly. That might do it. Anything, anything, as long as he would settle their lives and she could be safe from these vapors.

She climbed the steps to her third floor apartment. High on the hill, it afforded an excellent view of the bay on one side and the city on the other.

She freshened up carefully. A bath, fragrant eau de cologne, her lounging slacks and jersey pullover. The more she thought about it, the more she thought tonight would be it. Mrs. Lester Dillon. Then she would be safe.

She brushed out her hair and just for a moment she fluffed it up around her face. Then she made a face at herself and rolled it up again neatly.

Thoughtfully she tidied the minute living room. She straightened the burlap lampshade she had made and turned the head of a milk glass chicken. A biting twinge hit her. It would be hard to leave this place. Les had never cared much for the decor. Too quaint, he had said, not enough substance.

The doorbell rang. She hurried to open it, mentally straightening her shoulders as she went. It was Les, of course, but a worried Les. His brow had lost that baby smoothness, and his eyes were lowered.

"Come in, Les," she said calmly. "Give me your hat. Drink?" she asked.

"Please." he said, and he sat gingerly in

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the plaid covered wing chair. He studied his hands. First one side and then the other.

This is it, Darcy thought as she mixed the cocktails. The crossroads. What she had been waiting for. The end of one life and the beginning of another. She picked up the tray and carried it out to the living room. "Here you are, Les," she said, handing him his drink, and shoving a dish of Spanish peanuts closer to him.

She crossed the room and sat on the love seat before the window. She watched Les. Watched him drain the drink nervously. Watched him touch the corners of his mouth with the cocktail napkin. Watched him set the drink carefully down on the table.

"Darcy," he began, "Mr. Mew has asked me to take over in his place . . ."

SHE BROKE IN, her voice husky with desperation. "This won't change things, will it, Les? I mean our own shop, our escape from Mew's?" Her voice trailed off; her heart pounded again, again, again.

He looked at the floor. "I don't think the shop would be practical for me, right now. I could never net the salary Mr. Mew offered me." He shifted in his chair, then went on, "My dear, there is something I simply must ask you." He let this pronouncement lie on the atmosphere a minute, as if to give it added meaning.

She stared at him, aghast. He was going to let them go on living this lie, indefinitely, and for money. Marriage under these circumstances would be . . . He opened his mouth to speak again, but she cut him off.

She rose from her chair. "I know what you're going to say Les, but I can't. No, I can't marry you now, or—or ever." Alarmed by his stricken look she searched her mind for explanatory phrases. How could she explain that a girl can't go on skulking, and keep her self-respect? How could she explain her feelings about the shop?

He drew himself up and stared off into the distance. "Darcy," he intoned solemnly, "you're mistaken if you think I came here to propose to you tonight. I came here to ask you to release me from our engagement."

"Oh," she said, and surprisingly there was relief in her voice. She and Les had nothing in common. She knew it now, and it was better this way.

He was almost simpering now. "I've found myself lately, growing fonder and fonder of Dorinda Mew. Then I realized it was love. Under the circumstances—well . . ." He broke off and looked pained.

She swallowed a giggle. Why hadn't she seen it before? Les looked just like Mr. Mew, at least he had the makings. Give him fifteen years and Dorinda. "I understand," she said gently. "And Dorinda. Does she feel the same way?"

Les's face got the rapt look Mr. Mew always got when he was talking about Mew's department store. Suddenly Darcy knew so much. Love, honor, their dreams, had flown away when Les got a toe hold in the Mew family. A bolt of sheer savage satisfaction coursed through her. She had broken off first, and it had shaken Les's delivery of what she knew now to be a rehearsed speech.

"Yes, Darcy," he chanted reverently, "Dorinda dearly loves me."

AT THAT, she almost howled. Les threw her a questioning glance, and through sheer will power, she sobered.

"I guess we won't have any trouble—no announcement, no ring. By the way, what kind of ring did you give Dorinda?"

He had the grace to flush. "An emerald cut solitaire. Not flashy, substantial, though. Father Mew gave it to me as a sort of . . ." He stopped quickly and threw Darcy a suspicious glance. "You aren't angry, are you? Dorinda would be hurt if you mentioned our—our . . ."

"Friendship?" she finished. "Certainly

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not. I'm happy for you." And then she giggled.

That giggle shattered his pride. She regretted it as soon as it was out. She could see by his injured look he was hurt to the quick. No girl had a right to laugh when Lester Dillon was breaking an engagement. Even if she beat him to it.

His voice got petty. "Darcy, you haven't gotten involved with that Travis, have you?"

Involved? She examined her heart, and a sudden shyness overcame her. Of course—she loved Marion. Two days had bound her to him. And what were his feelings? If there was nothing more, at least she knew he liked her. That thought was vastly comforting.

She awoke to the fact that Les was looking at her curiously. Covering her embarrassment, she said, "What makes you think that, Les?"

"Oh, I don't know, but you did look rather, well . . ." he shrugged and spread his hands, "when I dropped in this afternoon. And then there is something Travis told some of us when he got here yesterday morning. He bragged to us that he'd make love to you and that would sure put spice in your copy. I believe those were the very words he used. Definitely the bounder type. Hate to disappoint you, Darcy."

Disappoint? What a gentle word for this tearing pain! She turned and started for the kitchen. Anything so Les couldn't see her face. With a bravado she didn't feel, she called over her shoulder, "You're dead wrong, Les. I think Marion Travis is childish, but fun, nothing more. I'll get the shaker and we'll have another drink. A toast to our separate ways."

"Can't," he said, "have to rush. Father Mew and Dorinda are waiting dinner for me, and it's five after eight.

She went to the door with him. "Well, you and Dorinda come over and see me often, won't you?"

"Certainly," he answered doubtfully and he disappeared down the stairs.

DARCY walked back to the room. Mechanically she picked up the glasses and carried them to the kitchen. Mechanically she ran water in the tank and shook in the soap flakes.

Over before it had ever begun. What an actor Marion was. She could have sworn he liked her; that he had her interests at heart. But instead he had been laughing at her.

If she didn't know Les so well, she wouldn't believe it. But Les didn't have the imagination for a good lie. She had to believe it. It all figured.

She had been prepared to take Marion's liking her, but not loving her. But to have him make fun of her, to toy with her emotions that way. Frustrated lovers make good writers, he had said. So he proceeded to make her one.

She bit her lip and reached viciously for the tea towel. She would clear up her work and clear out. Maybe go up to Seattle. She didn't want the darn job.

The doorbell rang again insistently. She walked across to it, drying her hands on her apron as she went.

"Marion," she whispered. And her hurt was suffocating. Why did he have to stand there, looking so darn friendly, so almost concerned?

"Aren't you going to invite me in?" he asked confidently.

She squared her shoulders. She wouldn't show him how she had been hurt. "Come on in," she invited offhandedly, but one traitorous tear slid down off her cheek.

His eyes flickered dangerously, then softened. "Oh, see here now, Darcy, no crying. You're well rid of him. He's not worth even one of your tears." He grabbed the tea towel from her hand and started mopping at her face.

She felt like laughing, like crying, like moaning. She must be getting hysterical,

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she thought frantically. "Well rid of whom?" she asked. But she knew. Everybody must have known about Les and Dorinda except her.

"Darcy, I've known about Dillon and Mew's daughter all day. Mew called me in this morning to go over the publicity plans for the wedding." He paused and his jaw tensed. "I felt like clipping your ex-beau on the nose. What a rotten thing to do. I met him at the corner. He looked mad as a wet hen when he saw me head this way. I guess he wishes he could have his cake and eat it too." He smiled ruefully. "I hope he enjoys horse-face at the breakfast table."

She flinched at the morsel of pity he was throwing her. "Well, for your information, I threw him over first." There! Now he wouldn't feel so darn sorry for her. She didn't want Marion's sympathy. Nor anyone's for that matter.

WHAT?" He came closer. "Say that again. No, don't bother. I heard you the first time." He bent over her and his arms were like steel at the small of her back, pulling her to him.

She wrenched herself free. "Stay away from me," she cried. "I hate men. Les is a pompous opportunist and you're a kiss-and-tell artist." Now he knew. Now maybe he would have the decency to go away. She turned and walked into the bedroom, locking the door behind her.

"And for your information, you can take that job you broke my heart to groom me for and keep it." She practically wailed this last and threw herself on the bed.

She heard his voice, close. He must be leaning against the bedroom door, she thought detachedly. Why didn't he give up and go away? Then in spite of herself, she listened.

"Darcy, who said anything about a job? Sure, at first, but you know that's my business. But certainly you had some idea how I felt. I wasn't grooming you for a job. I was grooming you for me. I wanted to get rid of those habits that have been cramping you so. I haven't told you, but you know, Darcy. You know I love you."

"Some kind of love," she answered brokenly. "Bragging about teaching me romance by kissing me."

"That was before I met you. Can't you take a joke? How was I to know I was going to fall for you?" He stopped for a moment, then his voice went on, sure and clear. "Angel, everything isn't cut and dried, in this life of ours. You have to laugh at some things and pass them off. Dillon has you so wound up with crooked thinking. You mean to say, you're going to throw something like this away on a point of pride?" His voice became gently chiding. "I guess I'll have to give you lesson number three on a sense of humor."

Sense of humor. She sat up on the bed. The first rollicking laugh she had had in years was with Marion. Les's petty white face mocked her. All pride, all ambition; no warmth, no fun. Les had led her down this stuffy path and she had followed, willy-nilly like a sheep. Les would enjoy knowing he had spoiled something for her. Well, he wasn't going to get the chance.

She got up from the bed and slowly turned the key in the lock. She opened the door and walked toward Marion.

"Marion," she cried, "teach me anything, everything." Then she walked into his outstretched arms.

"Darcy," he murmured, and his arms folded tightly around her.

The kiss lifted her up and whirled her around, but before she completely lost her head she had one coherent thought. Tomorrow would be a busy day. She would get an angel cut, and that black gown for tomorrow night. And if it was gone, there would be another somewhere. A whole procession of them, for schmaltzy evenings for a long, long time.

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# Loves That Live Forever

By EVERETT H. ORTNER

IT IS NOT known precisely when Elizabeth Schuyler and Alexander Hamilton first met, but the place and the circumstances are on record. It was the Schuyler Mansion in Albany, and General Schuyler had brought home with him, on leave, the young and handsome Hamilton. The grim battlefields and the roar of cannon and musket were for the moment behind them and all was gaiety.

"My dear," the General said, "may I present Colonel Hamilton? Colonel, my daughter."

The formal ritual of those days can very easily be imagined. "I am honored, Colonel Hamilton," she would have said. "The General has mentioned you so often."

"The pleasure is mine, dear Miss Schuyler," Hamilton said, bowing.

As they gazed into each other's eyes, forgotten were the harrowing campaigns through which he had come. The little skirmishes with which the Revolution had begun had turned into full-scale war. Ahead were the terrible days of Valley Forge, and Saratoga and Princeton, of Long Island and Yorktown, and yet these early Americans looked serenely into the future, knowing well that everything worthwhile is dearly bought, and that the price of freedom can never be too high.

The muskets that hung over the fireplace in every home were taken down and oiled. Men kissed their wives and families good-by, often never to return. Boys became men and young men became old and gray, for these were times that aged men quickly. Alexander Hamilton was barely in his twenties, but he lived in a day when youth was not considered a disadvantage. He had already risen to become *aide-de-camp* to General George Washington. Later, he was to command a corps, the youngest officer in American history ever to command so large a body of men.

Elizabeth Schuyler, too, had matured rapidly in those dangerous times. Hostile Indians often made forays into the outlying area around Albany. Indeed, the great banister of the Schuyler home bore the deep mark of a tomahawk, made when an Indian had pursued Elizabeth's sister up the stairs. Luckily, the Indians had been beaten off and the sister saved.

HAMILTON'S stay, that first time, could hardly have been longer than a few days, before his duties called him back. But it had been long enough for him to make up his mind. To Elizabeth's sister Angelica he wrote:

*I venture to tell you in confidence that by some odd contrivance or other, your sister has found out the secret of interesting me in everything that concerns her. . . .*

*But I have some things of a very serious and heinous nature to lay to her charge. She is most unmercifully handsome and so perverse that she has none of those pretty affectations which are the prerogatives of beauty. Her good sense is destitute of vanity. Her good nature is unembellished with frivolousness. In short, she is so strange a creature, that she possesses all the beauties, virtues and graces of her sex without any of those amiable defects which from their general prevalence are esteemed necessary by connoisseurs in the character of a woman. . . .*



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During the winter of 1779-80, Washington's army was encamped at Morristown, New Jersey, and there Elizabeth and young Hamilton got to know each other better. Elizabeth's dearest friend was Kitty Livingston, whose father owned a house at Elizabethtown, not far from Morristown, and that winter Elizabeth visited with her friend. Hamilton was also a frequent visitor.

When Elizabeth finally left for her home, she was scarcely out of Hamilton's sight before he was writing her:

*I love you more and more every hour. The sweet softness of your mind and manners . . . the real goodness of your heart . . . its tenderness to me . . . the beauties of your face and person . . . your unpretending good sense and that innocent simplicity and frankness which pervade your actions. All these appear to me with increasing amiableness, and place you in my estimation above all the rest of your sex. . . .*

*Yours, my angel, with inviolable fidelity.*

Some time during that winter of 1779 they had become engaged, but the courtship was interrupted incessantly by his journeyings in the course of his duties. Nevertheless, he wrote her constantly. He was witness to many of the most dramatic scenes then being enacted. Hamilton it was whom General Washington sent after Benedict Arnold, after Arnold had betrayed his country. Arnold was never caught, but in his letters to Elizabeth, Hamilton described his visit to Mrs. Arnold and the pathos of the scene he found there. Hamilton, too, was much involved with the trial of Major Andre, the British officer who was captured with messages for Arnold.

All these things he wrote about to Elizabeth, sharing the drama of the great events in which he lived with her, receiving in return the comforting letters that gave him the inner strength to continue with his perilous work.

Occasionally he accused her, jokingly, of being too much of a distraction from his duties.

*I have told you and I told you truly that I love you too much. You engross my thoughts too entirely to allow me to think of anything else. You not only employ my mind all day, but you intrude on my sleep. I meet you in every dream and when I wake I cannot close my eyes again for ruminating on your sweetness . . . I believe in my soul you are an enchantress . . .*

In December, 1780, they were married in the huge old Schuyler home which still stands. The honeymoon was a short one, for the war still dragged on. But that summer, with the battle of Yorktown and the surrender of the English forces under Lord Cornwallis, saw an end to the fighting. Now in the years ahead, was a peace to be won, and a country to be built.

DURING the last phases of the war, Hamilton had devoted much of his spare time to reading law, and upon his discharge from the army he took up this pursuit in earnest. Soon he was admitted to the Bar, and he and Elizabeth took up residence in New York City where he soon became one of the rising attorneys of the new country.

Theirs was an active life. Their home became a meeting place for all the notables of the day, and many important conferences took place there, for Hamilton had become, by sheer force of mind, one of the new nation's foremost statesmen. When the Constitutional Convention was held, Hamilton was appointed one of the delegates, and thereafter he traveled back and forth between New York and Philadelphia incessantly. He served as a Representative during the days of the Continental Congress, and later, when the New York State Legislature was in session considering the adoption of the new Constitution, he spent much time in Albany.

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When the Constitution was adopted finally, a great celebration was held in New York, and a parade was organized. Leading the parade was a full-rigged ship to symbolize the Federal Party, of which Hamilton was the leader. On the ship was proudly printed the name: *Hamilton.*

In 1789 George Washington called him to Philadelphia to serve as Secretary of the Treasury, and the Hamiltons resided there for six years. These were work-filled years for him. The finances of the new country were in a perilous state. Taxes came in in the smallest of trickles, but expenses seemed to double almost daily. There was an Army to maintain against the west, where daily, Indians made savage incursions against the white settlers. At sea, foreign privateers and pirates waged war in some cases right within American ports. It would take a stout and costly Navy to put an end to this. A Post Office had been established and had to be staffed and equipped with stages and horses and all the necessary gear. There were taxes and customs to be collected, and all these things took money and work.

In 1895 Hamilton resigned his high office. Over the years his family had increased steadily in size. Philip had been the first child of the Hamiltons. Then had come Angelica and Alexander Jr., and James and John and Stephen and Elizabeth. It took money, a lot of it, to support such a brood, and Hamilton was forced to go back into private law practice to get that money.

Also, he felt, it was time to establish a real home for them. So, several years after their return to New York, Hamilton started to build his famous home on the Hudson River, the Grange, not far from where New York's Central Park is now.

THE HAPPY years followed. His law practice prospered; his children grew toward maturity; his love, Elizabeth, was ever at his side.

But just as the seven prosperous years in the Bible were followed by the seven lean years, so tragedy now followed happiness. Their eldest son, Philip, the apple of his parents' eyes, who had shown such promise in college and later in his law studies under his father's tutelage, was killed in a duel. It was little consolation to the grieving parents that he had died defending what he considered his honor. He was gone.

Still further tragedy followed in the wake of that grief. Angelica, their daughter, was so overcome by the death of her brother that her mind was permanently impaired.

But even through this the Hamiltons retained their courage. They had gone through so much together that nothing could ever shake the foundations of their marriage—except death.

That Grim Visitor was not long in coming. A scant two years after the death of Philip, Hamilton became involved in a political dispute with Aaron Burr, the brilliant but unscrupulous Vice President of the United States. Notes were exchanged and seconds appointed, and on the morning of July 11, 1804, on a deserted meadow in New Jersey, the two men met in a formal duel. Burr proved the better marksman. His first shot left Hamilton lying mortally wounded on the damp ground.

Hamilton's friends quickly carried him into a waiting boat and brought him to a friend's house in New York. There he murmured feebly, "Let Mrs. Hamilton be immediately sent for, but let the news be broken to her gently."

Soon Elizabeth arrived with their children, and the dying man gazed through misted eyes at them. Then suddenly the labored breathing ceased as the soul departed his body to venture into eternity.

*(Please turn to page 110)*

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# Ask Me No Questions

By HELEN AHERN

**A girl can't blame a man for deception, when her very existence is a lie.**

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DOCTOR HONORE PAGET was buying gloves. Linda measured her square, capable hand and asked her preference as to color.

Honore Paget said, "Hmmm. Violet eyes, black hair, gardenia skin, all the makings, and probably the inclinations, of a glamour girl. Why couldn't she have been nominated instead of you, Lovel?"

She turned to a younger edition of herself, a sturdy girl with brown hair and brown eyes. Linda stared at mother and daughter. They were talking about her violet eyes and her smoky hair.

Lovel Paget laughed. "Maybe we could hire her. In the Civil War, conscripts could send substitutes."

Her mother's eyes sparkled. "Lovel,



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you've really got something there, dear."

She whirled back to the glove counter, and it took her just five minutes to find out that Linda Bailey was nineteen, that she was an orphan, answerable to no one except a married sister, and that she was free and willing to take a job in New York. Dr. Honore beamed and made Linda promise to come and see her as soon as the store closed that afternoon.

The Pagets lived in a rambling house on the outskirts of town, convenient to the Paget Foundation. Dr. Honore was head of the Foundation, a sanitarium where infantile paralysis was studied and treated. Lovel was her assistant and, like her mother, dedicated to her work.

She said to Linda, "I won't be a debutante. Why should I, just to give a great-aunt whom I've never seen the fun of throwing a Long Island coming-out party?"

"Because your Aunt Carolyn has contributed to the Foundation on the understanding that I raise you to take your proper place in society," her mother answered.

Lovel, cross-legged on the floor in front of the fireplace, flashed her a grin.

"You tried, darling. I ran away from three finishing schools. I'm just not debutante material, any more than you were."

"No, I'm afraid you're not," Honore Paget agreed and smiled at Linda. "And that's where you come in."

AMAZINGLY, she wanted Linda to be Lovel Paget for a little while, to take the debut and the Long Island summer that Miss Carolyn Lovel was determined to give her grand-niece. Miss Carolyn never had seen Lovel.

"And it's unlikely that she ever will," Dr. Honore said. "She thinks civilization stops at the Alleghenies. When it's all over, you can come back to Ohio and resume your own identity. Presumably, Lovel will return to her work which, actually, will never have been interrupted. No one will be the wiser."

"But I haven't the education to be a debutante," Linda insisted.

"You speak as well as Lovel; you come from good stock. I've done a little investigating." Dr. Honore smiled. "And you'll be easier for Aunt Carolyn to train than a girl who is more interested in bacteria than in clothes and dates."

"Train?" Linda repeated, and Lovel giggled.

"That's another thing that gets me down. Auntie has it all arranged that I'm to move in with some post-deb and learn the ropes before I'm officially inflicted on Long Island. She's even got a press agent lined up. Can you take it?"

Linda looked doubtful and Dr. Honore said, persuasively, "You'll receive a weekly salary from us, in addition to a free vacation and all the clothes that my aunt will buy for her debutante niece. It's an unusual opportunity."

Linda had to admit that it was. Clothes, and a summer on Long Island, in return for playing a harmless trick on a capricious old woman whose whim threatened to interfere with honest, humanitarian work.

As she argued with herself, Dr. Honore said, "I hope you're not hesitating on account of some young man."

Linda shook her head. There was no young man except Larry Mitchell. She thought of tempestuous, unpredictable Larry. She had known him since he was a shabby, pugnacious urchin and, briefly, had loved him. Larry was attractive in his dark, stormy way, but he was becoming a problem. He railed at her because she had fallen out of love and refused to marry him. He railed at the world because he was a garage mechanic instead of a white collar man.

She told Dr. Honore a little about Larry, and Dr. Honore said:

"That settles it. You must go."

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LINDA did not protest further, and Lovel and her mother turned to practicalities. They found out that Linda could leave immediately and that she had sufficient clothes for the present. Dr. Honore hoped that she did not have to confide her plans to anyone.

"Only to my sister Sheila," Linda said. "She would worry otherwise. But Sheila's close-mouthed and so is Joe, her husband."

"That's swell." Lovel scrambled to her feet with a glance at the clock on the mantel. "Got a date to meet Hank, and I'll make it a late one, so as not to barge in on the lad from Long Island. I'll leave dear Nigel to you, Better Self."

She flashed Linda a grin and left. Dr. Honore smiled at Linda's bewildered face and explained about Hank.

"An interne at the Foundation, Dr. Henry Brill," she said, "and one of the reasons why Lovel is so dead set against New York and a debut."

"And this Nigel?" Linda asked.

Dr. Honore stirred the fire before she answered. "His name is Nigel Creighton. I gather that Aunt Carolyn is a friend of his mother and for this reason he is taking Lovel, or rather you, in charge. He's to be a manager and press agent of sorts. You'll meet him tonight."

Linda gasped, and Dr. Honore said, "When Aunt Carolyn makes up her mind, she wants action. She is sending the young man out here to bring back her glamour girl post haste. Tomorrow, preferably."

"Tomorrow?"

Linda's voice was weak. She had a feeling of being trapped in the path of a hurricane, but she was given no chance to withdraw from the venture. Dr. Honore looked at the clock.

She said, "The Creighton man is arriving on a six o'clock plane and should be here any time. I'll ask him to dinner and you'll have to be present. If you want to freshen up, you'll find powder and lipstick in Lovel's room, at the head of the stairs."

Linda found the room and was applying lipstick to her mouth when Nigel Creighton's taxi stopped in front of the house. She flew to the window and had an upside-down view of hair that was neither brown nor red. Beneath it was some six feet of rangy young man.

She hurried downstairs to have Honore Paget present her as her daughter. Nigel Creighton looked startled, and Linda was afraid that he had seen through their substitution.

"You're not what I expected," he said honestly.

Dr. Honore laughed. "No doubt Aunt Carolyn warned you that my daughter would probably be built on service lines, the way I am. I was a fearful disappointment with my ordinary looks and my yen for medicine."

"You've done splendidly, Dr. Paget," Nigel told her gallantly. "Both in your medicine, and in your daughter."

HIS EYES smiled into Linda's and she was as undecided about them as she had been about his hair. They were neither blue nor green. She imagined they were the color of the sea that she had never seen. He had an engaging smile.

He told her, "You'll be a treat to a press agent. Particularly to an amateur press agent like me. I've never been one before. Mind?"

"Why should I? I've never been a debutante before," Linda said.

They laughed together, and his laughter was a strange rippling intoxicant in her veins. Dr. Honore urged them in to dinner. Linda sat opposite Nigel and his eyes, meeting hers, were now green. His hair was coppery red in the candlelight of the dining room.

"Lovel," he said musingly. "It's a family name of course, and nice. But I shall call you Love."

Linda could feel herself flushing, and Dr. Honore looked worried. After Nigel

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had taken a reluctant departure, she said, "I hope, child, that I'm not getting you into something that will leave you with heartbreak."

"I'll take a chance," Linda replied.

Her violet eyes were star-dusted with secret excitement that silenced conscience and overrode fear. She looked forward breathlessly to tomorrow, when she and Nigel would take an afternoon plane east. She would have to be at the Pagets' home, bags packed, by noon.

Linda said good night to Dr. Honore and went to her sister. She lived with Sheila and Joe Tiernan who were kind, but self-absorbed relatives. They were dumbfounded by Dr. Honore's proposition, but neither made any real objections to Linda's acceptance. She said practically what Linda had thought.

"It's screwy but you'll have fun. No one will be hurt, and you'll get away from that Larry Mitchell."

Sheila was not an admirer of Larry. She was a trim, efficient young wife, and had no use for failure and complaining. Big, sandy Joe Tiernan who managed the garage where Larry worked, was more tolerant.

JOE SAID, "Nothing wrong with Larry except that he's carrying too big a torch. It may be a good thing for him to have you out of town. At least, he won't waste all his dimes telephoning. Five of them tonight, Linda, and he's going to call again."

The telephone rang as he spoke.

Larry was indignant and hurt. They had had a half date which, in spite of the hour, he wanted to keep. Linda said he could come over for a few minutes. He did love her, and once a very young Linda had loved him. She owed him a good-by.

"But for heaven's sake," she warned Sheila and Joe, "don't tell him what I'm planning to do. I'll have to make up a story for him, leaving the Pagets out."

"Tell him that the store is sending you East to study designing," Sheila suggested.

"It's an idea," Linda said, and went to the door, hoping the lie would work.

Larry must have run the blocks between his rooming house and the Tiernan's apartment. He came in, out of breath and disheveled.

He was a handsome boy, black-haired and black-eyed, with a wiry, graceful body. He was not as tall as Nigel Creighton, Linda thought, and then was ashamed of herself for making comparisons between the two. Nigel had background, breeding, and charm. Larry had nothing but charm and tonight, that was not much in evidence. He was surly and belligerent about her unexplained absence.

She dreaded telling him that she was leaving him for the summer and put it off until Sheila and Joe had gone to bed. Then she told him the story about a store-sponsored course in designing. It sounded thin in the telling.

"I don't believe a word of it," he said. "That store of yours is neither a charitable nor an educational institution."

"It's a new experiment."

Alarmed that his suspicions might lead him to the truth, Linda set about making her fabrication plausible. He was convinced, although not consoled.

"So you go up in the world while I stand still," he said morosely. "Just a guy with a dinner pail. But I'm not going to stay that way. I'll get money. I'll put myself in a spot where you'll look up to me, if I have to get a gun to do it!"

His voice and his dark eyes were wild. She said, "Larry, please!" She was troubled by these dark moods of his. But they were gone as soon as they came.

"Linda, I'm sorry. I'm talking like a fool."

HE DROPPED down beside her and buried his rough black head in her lap. She was touched by pitying tenderness and re-

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membered love. She took his head between her slim hands. His hair was crisp and coarse. She wondered how Nigel Creighton's hair, that was neither brown nor red, would feel against her fingers.

Her light touch electrified Larry. In a flash, he was on his feet, pulling her from her chair, gathering her up.

"Linda, darling, darling! Tell me that you care a little bit! Promise that you'll come back to me!"

"Larry, I do care but . . ."

He would not let her qualify her statement. He stopped her with arms that threatened to crush her, with hungry lips that took fierce possession of her lovely soft mouth. She let him.

But only a part of her surrendered to Larry's desperate, passionate embrace. There was another part which was thinking that she must send him home so as to get rested for her trip tomorrow. For Nigel! Larry's kiss lost its synthetic thrill and she twisted from his arms.

"If I'm not busy at the garage, I'll be seeing you off at the airport," he said.

If she had any influence with Joe Tiernan, he would be busy at the garage, she resolved.

She wore a traveling suit of soft gray wool and a frivolous flower hat of violets that matched violet doeskin gloves and violet eyes.

Nigel said, "You look like a bride."

Linda blushed. She felt like a bride, in the beginning. Flying over the Alleghenies, she began to have qualms about what might lie ahead. She found out from Nigel that his sister was the post-deb whom Miss Carolyn Lovel had selected as a teacher.

"What's she like?" she asked.

"Sister Glenna is smooth," he said.

"And Miss—Aunt Carolyn?"

He laughed. "Tarragon vinegar, aged in wood."

Neither description was very reassuring. Without enthusiasm, Linda saw New York spread out beneath the plane. Involuntarily, she stretched out a slim hand toward Nigel. His fingers, warm and hard and understanding, closed around hers. She smiled uncertainly.

"Sweet," he said softly. "Sweet Love!"

And then, indifferent to fellow passengers he put his arm around her and laid his lips to her tremulous mouth lightly. It was a promise of a kiss, rather than a kiss itself, but it tingled its way straight to the soles of Linda's trim pumps.

HE RELEASED her quickly, his expression a trifle rueful. "That," he said, "might look like a press agent taking advantage of a client, but it was really for good luck."

La Guardia Airport was rising to meet them. She gazed down, her fingers pressed to her lips as if to imprison that brief kiss. It was just a good luck kiss, but it lingered and made New York unimportant.

Miss Carolyn was waiting for them at her hotel on Central Park South. Nigel had said she was tarragon vinegar aged in wood, but even that did not prepare Linda for her aunt-by-substitution. She was tall and angular, with faded but piercing blue eyes, iron gray hair smartly waved, and a brightly painted mouth. She must have been seventy, but she was as up-to-date as a radio flash.

She put down a glass of brandy, crushed out a cigarette, and kissed Linda on both cheeks. Then she held her off for inspection.

"Ummm!" She sounded satisfied. "You're good looking like the Lovels, although you don't actually resemble any of them. I suppose you take after your father?"

"I guess so," Linda answered, confused. She had not the faintest idea what her supposed father had looked like. Nigel sensed her unease without knowing the cause and came to her rescue.

He suggested, "How about telling Love our plans for the summer?"

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Aunt Carolyn said, "You call her Love? Haven't you told her that she's going to spend this month with you?"

Linda looked startled and they explained. The Creightons, Nigel, Glenna and their mother, had opened their Long Island home early. Linda would stay with them during the month of May, getting ready for her debut, while Miss Carolyn took her annual rest cure at White Sulphur Springs. She would return in June to open her own Southampton house which was now overrun by carpenters and decorators.

"Fixing it up for your coming-out," Miss Carolyn said, "which is going to be the biggest and best coming-out Long Island has ever seen. We'll have two orchestras, maybe three. A couple of artificial moons, and chuck wagons."

"Hot dog wagons," Nigel said, grinning at Linda. "Your aunt has heard they're the thing to top off debuts."

"We'll have the works," Miss Carolyn finished. "And now, let's order some dinner, so you and your Love can be on your way." She added to Linda, "I think it best you get settled at the Creightons' tonight, since I'm heading south in the morning. I've been waiting over only to say hello and good-by."

THE HURRICANE, in which she had been caught, was increasing in velocity. But it was fun driving out to Southampton in Nigel's convertible. He drove with the top down and the May night met them, warm and sweet.

They sped along the South Shore of the Island and turned into a tree-lined drive. The Creightons' summer home was impressive but slightly shabby. From the terrace that fronted the Atlantic, laughing voices mingled with the pound of surf and an insistent radio tuned to dance music.

Nigel braked the car and yelled, "Glenna!"

His sister hurried through the house to greet them. She was a slender, pale girl with cool gray eyes and smooth mahogany hair. She was poised and casually smart in slacks and shirt. She welcomed Linda in a clipped voice that was neither friendly nor unfriendly.

Nigel said, "Who are the customers? I didn't expect you to be throwing a party."

"It isn't a party," his sister told him. "Just Bram and his gang. And Dinah Farr, on your trail as usual."

He colored and looked relieved to have his mother flutter in. Mrs. Creighton kissed Linda.

"My dearest child! I knew your mother and we're delighted to have you here."

She was expansive in speech and in appearance. Glenna cut into her chatter with a touch of impatience.

"Love's probably tired. I'll show her to her room," she said.

Linda thanked her, but she was too excited to be tired and was glad to have Nigel order, "Bring her back down."

Glenna took her up to a room that had a view of the ocean. One of the best rooms in the house, Linda surmised. The Creightons were treating her handsomely, although Glenna remained detached.

Glenna said that it would not be necessary to change to meet the crowd, but Linda insisted that she would feel better if she freshened up. Taking Glenna's slacks for an example, she slipped into a sports dress of violet linen and fastened her hair back of her ears with pert ribbon bows. Looking a sophisticated fifteen, she joined the crowd on the terrace. Glenna introduced her to the guests.

Linda tried to attach names to a half dozen faces. Then, Glenna said:

"Dinah Farr."

SHE WAS THE girl about whom Glenna had teased Nigel. Linda was all attention.

"The glamour girl to end glamour girls."

The whisper came from a slight dark man with wise eyes and a wicked grin.

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Dinah nodded briefly to Linda and came forward with outstretched hands and a cry of welcome for Nigel. Dinah was truly glamorous, an ash blonde with slanted aquamarine eyes.

Nigel said, "Hi, beautiful. What brings you to the country in the unseasonable month of May?"

"What but you, my pet?"

Dinah was arrogantly frank. Linda heard him laugh but could not see his face. She was being introduced to the slight dark man. He was the Bram whom Glenna mentioned. Glenna said that he was a photographer and extremely popular.

"Get your hair done by Josef, your picture taken by Bram Reade, and you've got glamour. Who could ask for anything more?"

Glenna was laughing, coming to life. She was mad about Bram Reade, Linda decided, and was disturbed to have Bram focus his attention upon herself. He found her a drink and carried her off to a shadowed glider swing. Nigel was dancing with Dinah who had turned up the radio and held out her arms to him. They danced as if they had danced often together, talking carelessly, matching steps automatically. Linda's violet eyes took on a lost look.

Bram Reade noticed the direction of her gaze. He grinned his ironic grin.

"Too bad Dinah hasn't as much money as glamour," he said. "She and Nig Creighton make a handsome twosome. As it is, the Creightons have lost too much money in the last ten years for him to afford a penniless glamour girl."

Linda felt as if she were peeping through a keyhole. She was relieved to see Nigel stop dancing and come over with Dinah. He pulled up two chairs. Dinah pouted. She had wanted to go on dancing.

"The music was just getting good," she said.

Nigel stretched out lazily and said, "I'm a weary traveler. Besides, I want you to get acquainted with Love—Lovel."

"Your successor to the glamour crown, Dinah," Bram Reade put in mischievously. "Want to bet?"

Dinah snapped, "No!"

"You're smart, Di." Bram laughed. "Miss Love Paget has what it takes."

"Her aunt has what it takes!"

Dinah's voice was furious. Linda repressed an hysterical giggle. It was ridiculous for the current glamour girl to be envying and fearing a salesgirl from Ohio. But it was terrifying to realize under what thoroughly false colors she was sailing.

SOMEONE was trailing and watching her. In vain, Linda tried to tell herself that it was simply conscience at work.

It was four weeks later. She had acquired a beautiful wardrobe and a passable imitation of Glenna Creighton's casual poise. Miss Carolyn had returned from White Sulphur Springs and Linda's debut was scheduled for Wednesday. This was Monday. Linda stayed on with the Creightons because Miss Carolyn refused to move out to Sauthampton until the day before the party when the last carpenter would have taken himself off her grounds.

Linda was driving into town to lunch with her the morning that she first noticed the Rent-and-Drive car parked in a lane facing the entrance to the Creightons' home. She thought it was empty until, in the rear vision mirror of Nigel's convertible, she saw a man rise up cautiously from beneath his wheel. His face was hidden by a low-pulled hat.

The previous night, she and Nigel had driven out to a newly opened Montauk inn to listen to a boogie-woogie piano player. They had the dining porch to themselves and were dancing intimately when somehow Linda felt that eyes were focused upon her. Looking around the grounds, she made out the figure of a man standing in the shadows of a tree, staring at them. Later she saw a Rent-and-Drive car in a far corner of the inn's parking lot.

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It could have been a different car. The first car might have stopped by accident opposite the Creightons'. The man beneath the trees might have been a curious villager. She was letting her imagination run away with her, she told herself.

But neither accident nor imagination could explain the man behind the sand dunes that afternoon.

She had gone down to the beach for a dip in the surf before cocktails. She ran along the sand, a slim nymph in a white bathing suit. The glint of sun on field glasses brought her up short. She stopped and whirled just in time to see the distant watcher duck behind a sandy hummock.

Linda stood for an instant, frozen. Then, swept by blind unreasoning panic, she raced back for the house. Nigel hailed her as she was about to run past their private salt water pool.

He was broad-shouldered and lean-hipped in navy blue trunks. He had just come up from a dive and his hair was darkly sleek against his head. With her knees feeling suddenly weak, she dropped down on the edge of the pool beside him. He looked at her curiously from between water-beaded lashes.

"I thought I saw a tramp," she said lamely. She was ashamed of the fears to which her dubious position made her liable.

"There are no tramps in sacred Southampton."

Nigel laughed and she tried to laugh with him, but she continued to tremble.

"Foolish darling!"

TENDER and concerned, he caught her to him and held her close. She felt the ripple of his muscles as she twined her slim arms about his bare shoulders. His blue-green eyes locked with hers for a hushed moment in which she began to tremble all over again. This time it was a glowing, delicious kind of trembling.

His lean face came closer, blotting out the sun. Her arms tightened around him and their lips met sweetly and deeply as if they had been created to meet. It did not matter that she was a masquerader who should have hung on to her heart with both small hands. Clinging to him, Linda knew that she had been living only to feel his arms around her, his mouth pressed down hard on hers.

A car horn tooted in the drive, and Nigel withdrew his arms, bleakness spreading over his face.

He said disappointingly, "I shouldn't have done that, Love, dear. But Bram was right, you've got what it takes." He added, "How you'll panic the stag line!"

She sprang up, her eyes hot with hurt tears. To hide them, she cut the water at her feet in a sharp swift dive just as Bram Reade and Dinah Farr came in sight. She emerged at the shallow end of the pool to find Bram waiting for her. He held out a hand to help her from the water. Dinah had taken her place beside Nigel.

Dinah was smart in a fuzzy sweater and soft wool skirt of aquamarine that matched her eyes. The afternoon sun turned her hair to silver gilt. Linda heard Nigel say, "Hi, always-beautiful," and her heart twisted. She thought she understood why he had made light of his impulsive kiss. He was in love with Dinah. Any man would be.

Linda became aware that Bram was continuing to hold her hand, while his gaze ran admiringly over her slim curved body. He said:

"I'll take a picture of you like this. It will make all the rotogravures."

"You've taken enough pictures of me," she told him. "I feel like a movie actress."

She pulled her hand away from his as she saw Glenna approaching from the house. Glenna's face looked pinched. With jealousy of Dinah eating at her own heart, Linda could sympathize and forgive the sharpness with which Glenna spoke to her.

"Sorry to interrupt you two," she said, "but the fitter is here with your dress."

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On Glenna's invitation, Bram and Dinah were spending the night. They dined and, afterward, danced to the radio on the terrace.

The atmosphere was electric with cross currents.

Dinah appropriated Nigel to practice rhumba steps. Bram would dance only with Linda and, when she withdrew to a corner, flopped on the porch floor at her feet. Glenna's hurt and chagrin was painfully obvious. Linda was torn between distress and annoyance. She did not even like Bram.

ON THE EXCUSE of getting a jacket, she left Bram and fled the house by a side door. Unconsciously, she headed in the direction of the pool where that afternoon Nigel had taken her to his heart and to heaven.

She saw a man materialize in the moonlight that flooded the tennis court, making no effort tonight at concealment. She choked back a scream. She recognized him.

He was Larry Mitchell!

She waited and he joined her swiftly. She stared at him in astonished dismay.

"Larry! What are you doing here?"

He eyed her sulkily. "Why shouldn't I be here? Did you think I'd stay parked in Ohio after you walked out on me and didn't even write? I'm asking, what are you doing here, pretending to be Lovel Paget, whipping around with the top-hats!"

"It's a long story." She led the way to a bench that was screened from the house by bushes. "You shouldn't have come. How did you find out where I was?"

Larry said, "I saw your picture in a Sunday paper with Lovel Paget's name underneath, and I made Joe Tiernan tell."

"Then you know that Lovel and her mother hired me to come here. I'm simply doing a job."

He looked her over. She was exquisite and expensive in a dinner skirt of black faille topped by a sheer lingerie blouse. He laughed unpleasantly.

"A pretty soft job I'd call it," he said nastily.

She frowned. He was in one of his black moods and promised to be a complication. Stalling for time, she asked what had happened to his job.

"I walked out on it," he told her. His black eyes looked wild in the moonlight. "I've found an easier way to make money."

Her worry deepened. "That's crazy talk, Larry," she said.

"Is it? Look at this!" He reached in his pocket and pulled out a thick roll of bills. "Real dough. Plenty to take you away from this gang of panty-waists. How about it?"

"Don't be silly." Her voice became edged. "I'm being paid by Dr. Honore and Lovel to take her place at her debut Wednesday night. I can't walk out on it. I don't want to."

"You'd walk out fast enough—by request—if I spilled what I know," he said.

She took a long breath and counted ten. She had to keep her temper. Her bargain with the Pagets might have been a mistake, but it remained a bargain. In fairness to them, she must prevent him from interfering with this debut for which such elaborate plans had been made.

She asked, "What would you gain by exposing and humiliating me?"

HE SAID sullenly, "I'd get you away from that Creighton guy who's giving you such a play."

If only Nigel were making a play for her, she thought. She shook her head at Larry and told him:

"You're all wrong. Nigel Creighton's in love with another girl."

"Maybe." He was unconvinced. "If he is, he hasn't any right to look at you the way he does. Remember, I've been keeping an eye on you."

"And that's another thing," she said. "You mustn't be following me around. People will notice."

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"Then take a little time out from them and give it to me. Let me have a date tomorrow night."

Linda said truthfully, "I'm staying in town with Lovel's aunt. The next night, you know, is the party."

"How about inviting me to your party? Or maybe you'd be ashamed of me."

She sighed. "It isn't that, Larry, but the invitations were sent out by a social secretary who went over every name on the list. I wouldn't know how to explain you."

"So I'll be on the outside, looking in," he said bitterly. "Like old times."

"I'm sorry."

She spoke gently. She was reminded of the little boy that he had been. Never a welcome guest at nice children's parties, he had swung on gates and jeered. Once she had smuggled out a dish of ice cream to him as he stood outside forlornly.

"Linda!"

His eyes flamed to the reminiscent softness that had crept into her voice. His arms reached for her, crushed her to him smotheringly. His mouth came down on hers, fierce and hard. Linda was motionless in his embrace. She dared not antagonize him by struggling. She did not feel like struggling. The pressure of his lips did simply nothing to her. And, in the end, her very passivity quickened Larry to anger. He shoved her from him and jumped to his feet.

"So you're trying to freeze me out," he said, and paid no attention when she shook her head. "It won't work. You're my girl and I'm sticking around. You'll be seeing me!"

HE STALKED off leaving Linda nervously at work on her smeared make-up. She hoped to get back into the house unobserved, but the party had spilled from the terrace to the lawn, and Bram saw her approach. He must have been prowling. He hailed her with malice in his eyes.

"Hi, Love! Who's the boy friend who goes in for midnight tennis?"

Color, mercifully hidden by the night, rushed to her cheeks. She answered as carelessly as she could, "Just a stranger who had lost his way and wanted directions."

Nigel, who had been adjusting a lawn chair for Dinah, straightened up.

"A stranger on our grounds? This is private property, posted. All the places along this shore are," he said. "That's funny. Maybe you did see a tramp this afternoon."

"Love saw a tramp this afternoon?"

Bram Reade gave her a sharp glance. He was shrewd and gossipy. He was the last person whose suspicions Linda wanted to arouse.

She said hastily, "Oh, let's not worry about it."

"Oh, let's do!" It was Glenna-speaking, her voice sarcastic. "Tramps and nocturnal trespassers. They make marvelous conversation and certainly get a girl attention."

"Glenna!" Nigel whirled on her. "What do you mean by talking like that about Lovel?"

"I mean that I'm sick of the whole business. Money can pay for just so much," Glenna said and, crying openly, ran into the house.

Linda stared after her, shocked. Beneath her well-bred mask, Glenna hated her! Linda went up to bed with her own eyes wet with dismayed tears.

The next night Miss Carolyn beamed at Linda. She had brought out a successful debutante and she was highly pleased with herself.

She demanded of Nigel, "Isn't she lovely? Isn't she a success?"

He said, "She's a one-woman riot. I had to brush off stags like flies in order to get her over here."

They had danced their way across the canopied pavilion to the flower-banked corner from which Miss Carolyn could keep

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an eye on her party and on her debutante.

"It's a grand party," Linda told her, and meant it. She was a dream in a slim white crepe with a daringly low bodice. Her eyes were darkly violet with excitement between curling black lashes.

Unexpectedly, she was enjoying this debut that did not belong to her. It was fun to be what Glenna had called a three-minute girl, and have the stag line cut in upon her every few feet. It was all the more fun because Nigel was proud and gaily possessive.

"LET'S HAVE a drink to celebrate," he said, and led her away from the dancing pavilion toward the terrace of Miss Carolyn's villa where a bar and buffet had been set up.

The vast grounds of the estate were a fairyland of colored lights that vied with a silvery June moon and low bending stars. It was a perfect night.

Linda looked about her and thought, I'll remember this when I'm an old, old lady. Nigel pressed her arm against his side.

"I beg your pardon, miss."

She turned impatiently to find Miss Carolyn's butler at her elbow. He seemed to want to speak to her alone, and Nigel went ahead up the terrace steps to the bar. The butler handed her a note, explaining:

"From a young man who insists upon seeing you. I think he's not an invited guest, but he seems to know you. I advised him to wait in the playhouse."

Linda took the note. She guessed from whom it was, before she tore it open and read:

*Linda, I've got to talk to you or go crazy. Meet me.*

*Larry.*

She sighed with exasperation, but she was afraid to ignore the summons. Nigel was at the bar. She let her eyes linger for a moment on him, handsome and debonair in a white dinner coat. Then slowly, she moved in the direction of the playhouse.

It was a low porticoed building that matched the Italian architecture of the mansion. It stretched around a marble swimming pool and housed dressing rooms, showers, and a game room.

She found Larry in the game room, practicing billiard shots. He wore a new suit, but it was of a flashy cut and color. Compared to the urbanely tailored young men with whom she had been dancing, he looked as shabby and alien as he had as a child. Linda's exasperation was lost in pity.

She said, "Hi, Larry. This must be rather a dull party for you. Shall I send you down a drink or a bite to eat?"

He brushed aside the suggestions with an irritable gesture. "I'm not hungry. It's you I want. Sit down and let the cat look at the queen."

He pulled up chairs in front of the huge fireplace that had been designed for chilled bathers, and there was nothing for Linda to do but seat herself. Inwardly, she was quivering with eagerness to go back to Nigel who must be wondering about her disappearance. He stared at her with feverish, urgent eyes.

"You look like a queen," he said. "You are a little queen, but you're mine. Tell me you're mine, Linda!"

"FOR HEAVEN'S sake, Larry, don't be so intense. This is no night to settle futures."

He said queerly, "There may not be so many nights left for us. I've got to have you, Linda. I've risked too much to give you up now."

"I don't know what you're talking about, and I'm not much interested," she told him, tired of his dramatics. "You know I don't love you."

He said, his voice low, "You're very sure of that, all of a sudden. Why?" She did not answer and he seized upon the truth.

"You're in love with that Creighton guy."

"What if I were?"

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Regardless of consequences she could not deny her love for Nigel. She saw Larry's dark face twist.

"What's the sense of being in love with a guy who doesn't even know your right name?" he asked pleadingly.

She admitted, "There isn't any."

"You'll just get hurt," he went on, pressing his advantage. "Get smart, sweet, and stick to your own kind. Let me take you away from here tonight. I've got a new car outside the gates. We'll go anywhere you say. We'll have fun."

"Where did you get a new car?" She attempted to bring him down to earth. "What about your job?"

"Don't you worry," he told her grandiloquently. "I'll take care of you. I'll hang you with diamonds."

He had become the wild, boastful Larry that she liked the least. She shook her head at him and was wondering how best to break away when she heard footsteps on the marble rim of the pool. They were a man's footsteps, coming in the direction of the game room. Her throat contracted as she waited for Nigel, and exposure.

But it was Bram Reade who sauntered through the door. Larry relaxed from the belligerent attitude that he had assumed. Bram grinned at Linda, his expression sly.

"Hope I'm not interrupting."

"I was just going back to the party," she said, and introducing Larry, she added, "An old friend from Ohio."

"Glad to meet you, Mitchell." Bram was wickedly cordial. "Why don't you join in the festivities?"

She held her breath and could have cried with relief when Larry said:

"No, thanks. I'm not dressed for this kind of shindig." To Linda he said, "I'll wait here. Think over what we were talking about."

SHE NODDED and escaped from the playhouse with Bram. He studied her curiously by the moonlight that filtered down on the tree-shaded path that led back to the terrace.

"So our lovely Love has a past," he said.

"What do you mean?"

He laughed. "My pet, it's perfectly obvious that your back-door caller has something on you. You were scared of him, and scared of having me meet him. I have no objection to pasts. They make the average girl more interesting; they make a girl like you irresistible."

His hand tightened on her elbow, halting her. Then, with surprising strength for one so slight, he swept her to him. He held her while he continued to laugh. It was ugly laughter that came from his ugly sly thoughts.

She pulled back, insulted and disgusted, but he paid no attention to her struggles. His mouth was closing down on hers. She managed to free one hand and acted in blind fury. Her polished fingernails raked down his left cheek. Bram's reaction was hot and instantaneous.

"You little cat!"

He let her go and glared while he daubed his cheek with his immaculate handkerchief. He was a vain man, and she could have done nothing to enrage him more. Amorous advances forgotten, he followed her to the terrace grimly. She had no idea how either of them would explain the scratches.

She saw Glenna hurrying across the terrace to meet them and began to regret that she had taken such visible revenge on Bram. Glenna cried:

"Bram, there's a spinster's dance coming up and I . . ." She noticed his face and stopped. "What happened?"

Bram said that he had had an argument in the playhouse with a Siamese kitten. Glenna did not pretend to believe him. Her gray eyes flashed to Linda.

"Perhaps I should have told you that playing games in dark corners isn't quite the way to pass the time on the night of your debut," she said. "But I imagined

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you had the essentials of decency if not of breeding. Otherwise, I never would have taken you on, no matter how much Miss Carolyn paid me to make you presentable."

"Miss—Aunt Carolyn gave you money for teaching me to be a debutante?" Glenna's lips curled scornfully. Bram was easing away from the unpleasant scene.

She asked, "Why else do you think that Nigel and I bothered with you? We're practically broke. We couldn't have opened our Southampton house if your aunt hadn't wanted a place to civilize you, and paid to have it opened."

Linda was paper-white. "Nigel," she whispered. "He was in it, too? He took the money to be nice to me?"

"Certainly." Glenna was relentless. "I hope you haven't any silly idea that he is in love with you. If you have, you'd better get over it. My brother's been in love with Dinah Farr for years, and this past month has been miserable for him with you coming between them. You must have been blind not to have seen."

"Very blind," Linda agreed and crossed the terrace in the slow careful way of the sick or intoxicated.

Nigel was still at the bar. An expression of surprised alarm escaped him as Linda appeared and he glimpsed her colorless face and stricken eyes.

"What is it, Love? Here, you'd better have a drink. How about brandy and soda?"

She nodded, and he had two highballs made up. "Better come and sit down," he advised and carried the drinks to a small iron table.

She took the chair that he pulled out for her but she did not touch her drink. She leaned across the table, her anguished heart in her eyes. "Nigel, have you been paid for what you've done to me?"

"Of course," he admitted calmly.

She rose. "That's all I wanted to know."

A little later, in the suite that had been assigned to her, she took off her white crepe evening dress. The soft gray suit that she had worn on her trip east was deep in the closet. She dug it out and put it on. Miss Carolyn had had the fun of a successful debut party. Lovel Paget would have to explain her supposed return to Ohio as best she could. Linda was going away from this false life where money could buy so much and so little. It was her one thought.

Not until she started to consider ways and means of leaving, did she remember Larry. He had a car ready for her. Why not? He was her kind.

Taking nothing but a handbag to avoid attracting attention to herself, she slipped down the back stairs and out to the grounds. She made a wide circle around the pavilion and reached the playhouse. Larry had waited.

"Linda, you're coming with me," he cried joyfully and would have taken her into his arms, but she held him off. He did not press her.

"Okay. Let's get moving," he said.

They avoided the drive and reached the gates unseen. At Linda's order, the keeper let them out.

Larry's new car was a showy cream-colored convertible, upholstered in red leather. Linda wondered where he had got the money to pay for it, but she was too tired, too essentially indifferent to question him. He started it up with a great show of power and headed for Manhattan. He had luggage piled in the back seat.

She said, "You must have been very sure of me."

Larry answered absently, "No, but it seemed a good idea to check out of my hotel this afternoon. I didn't like the looks of a couple of guys I saw in the lobby."

There was something going on into which she should inquire, she thought. They crossed Manhattan, left it by the Holland Tunnel. Dawn was pink in the

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east. He swung south with an exultant laugh.

"Keep this up," he said, "and we'll be in Maryland by noon or a little after."

"Maryland?" Her eyes widened. She had taken it for granted that they were going back to Ohio. "Why Maryland?"

He said, "It's easy to get married there."

"Married?" she whispered, and he grew alarmed and indignant.

YOU KNEW that I wanted to marry you. Surely you didn't figure on traveling around the country with me without marrying me?"

"I thought we were going home."

"Some day," he said. "First we're going to see a bit of the world."

He continued to drive steadily southward and Linda made no further protest. She leaned back in her corner of the seat, thinking.

Married to Larry, she would have no right to remember the lying sweetness of Nigel's lips, the way his eyes changed from blue to green. Perhaps in time, she would cease to remember.

She must have slept long from emotional exhaustion. It was almost noon when she woke up.

Larry wanted to know if she would like to stop for food.

Linda said, "No." She felt physically as well as emotionally sick. Larry was pleased with her decision.

"The sooner we get there the better!"

He slowed the car to pull her to him and kiss her hard on the mouth. The rolling hills of Maryland were hazily blue straight ahead of them.

Linda did not know the name of the sleepy town where they stopped. There was a red brick courthouse and an old-fashioned frame hotel. Larry went immediately to the hotel and took a double room. A slow-moving bellboy brought up Larry's bags.

Larry said, "Have a rest for yourself, hon, while I get the license and round up a justice of the peace."

He took off her jacket, letting his hands linger on her shoulders which began to quiver uncontrollably. She tried to hang on to the numbed calm that had carried her this far. Unwillingly, she was coming back to life and pain and a measure of reason. She put her hands against his chest, pushing him back, when he tried to kiss away the tears that spilled down her white cheeks.

"Don't. It's all wrong. This is all wrong." With a sweep of her hand she indicated the starkly intimate room. "I can't go through with it. I'm sorry."

"Sorry? You're sorry?" His voice rose and cracked. "Do you think you can get away with that after the jam I've got myself into on your account?"

"What jam?" She blinked away her tears. She could no longer ignore his strange remarks, the dark hints that he had let fall. She said, "Tell me, Larry, what have you done?"

HE HESITATED, then blurted it out. "I cracked the garage safe."

She listened in horror while he gave her the details. He had gone down on a night when the safe was well loaded with first of the month collections. The next day was payday, and Joe Tiernan had not bothered to take the money to the bank.

"I got six grand altogether," he said.

Linda looked at him steadily. "Six thousand dollars of Joe's money?"

"Company money." He squirmed but tried to brazen it out. "Joe's just the manager."

"But he's responsible for any losses. Larry, how could you do that to Joe?"

He gave her a defiant stare.

"Why should I worry about him? You'd walked out on me. I needed money to get you back."

She said, "If you're caught, it will mean years in prison. And they *will* catch you."

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"Not me! The cops think it was an outside job. I made it look that way. I was smart and I'm going to stay smart. Stick with me, and you'll see."

All trace of repentance had vanished from his voice. She was appalled. For her sake, a man had committed a crime. It was a horrible decision that she had to make.

Larry was watching her sharply. He said, "Don't get any bright notions about telling on me. You're tied up in this now. Accessory after the dirty deed, or something. You're as guilty as I am."

That was nonsense, but she pretended to believe him. What she had to do must be done without his knowledge. She did not protest when he came over and put his arms around her.

He said he would have to leave her for a while, if he were to get a marriage license before the bureau closed. It was exactly what she wanted him to do.

There was hotel stationery and the usual pad of telegraph blanks in the desk. As soon as he was gone, Linda wrote out a cautiously worded telegram to Joe Tiernan. She dared not telephone for her brother-in-law, in case her call should be listened in on and Larry be picked up by the local police before Joe arrived. Joe, she was sure, would make the charges against Larry as easy as he could. If he flew, he should be with them by early evening.

She picked up the telephone to summon a bellboy, then put it down. Her telegram was the kind that should be delivered personally to the telegraph office. She slipped back into her jacket, hurriedly made herself presentable, and stepped out into the hall. Simultaneously, two men who had been leaning against the wall opposite her door stepped forward.

"We've been waiting for you, sister. Better come along quietly."

The shorter of the two reinforced his command by flipping back his vest to reveal a police badge from Larry's and her home town. The hotel hallway reeled around Linda. The second policeman steadied her with a not unkindly hand beneath her elbow.

He said, "It's a tough break, kid. Maybe you're not in on this. I hope not, but we'll have to take you around to the station anyhow. The boy friend's already there. We picked him up at the courthouse in the marriage license bureau."

They took her before a sheriff who talked with a pleasant drawl. The Ohio officers related how they had trailed Larry to New York, missed him at his hotel, then followed him to Long Island. Linda gathered that they had not been particularly anxious to interfere with Miss Carolyn Lovel by arresting him on her premises.

The sheriff was very much a gentleman and very gallant to Linda. Encouraged, she produced the telegram to Joe Tiernan that she had gone out to send. The officers agreed that she was very likely in the clear and left her to the care of the sheriff's wife to await Joe's arrival.

She refused food but drank a cup of tea. The sheriff's wife rigged up a cot for her in the office adjoining the jail.

Much later she heard the sheriff talking to someone outside the office door. She sat up. It sounded as if she had a caller.

The sheriff said, "Go right in, sir. I guess she'll be glad to see you." He opened and closed the door upon a tall young man whose brown hair gleamed redly and whose blue eyes were green in the twilight dimness of the office.

Linda whispered, "Nigel!"

Nigel said nothing at all. He lifted her up in his arms. His kiss possessed her mouth, held her quivering lips and would not free them. Beneath its sweet demand, her fierce young pride crumpled. She clung to him, sobbing.

"Nigel, Nigel, how did you get here?" she asked. And then she said, "Oh, you

*(Please turn to page 112)*

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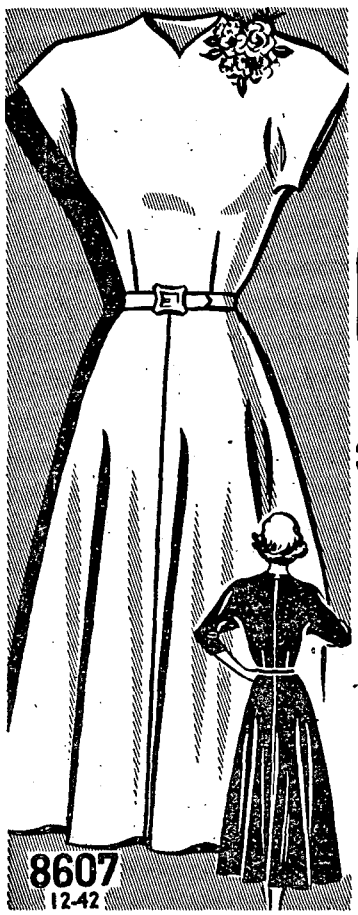


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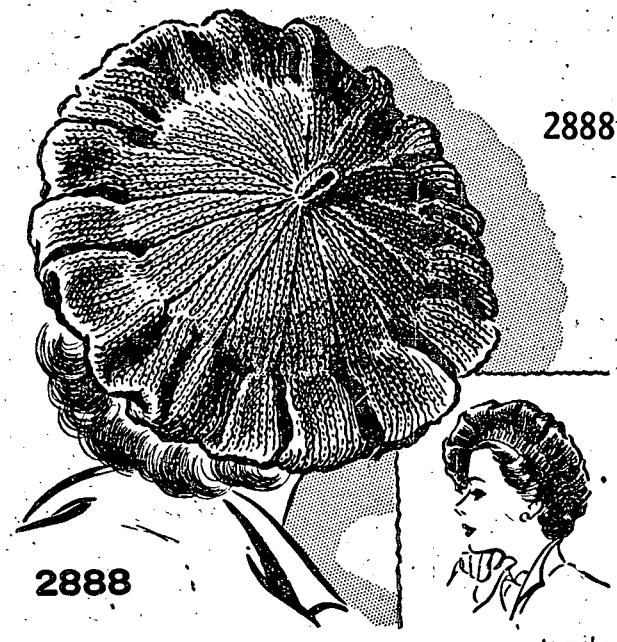


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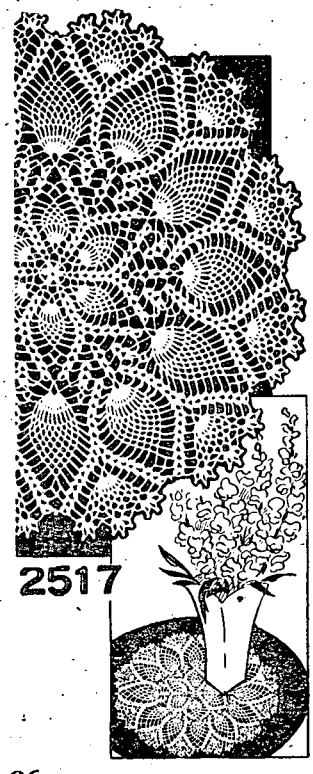


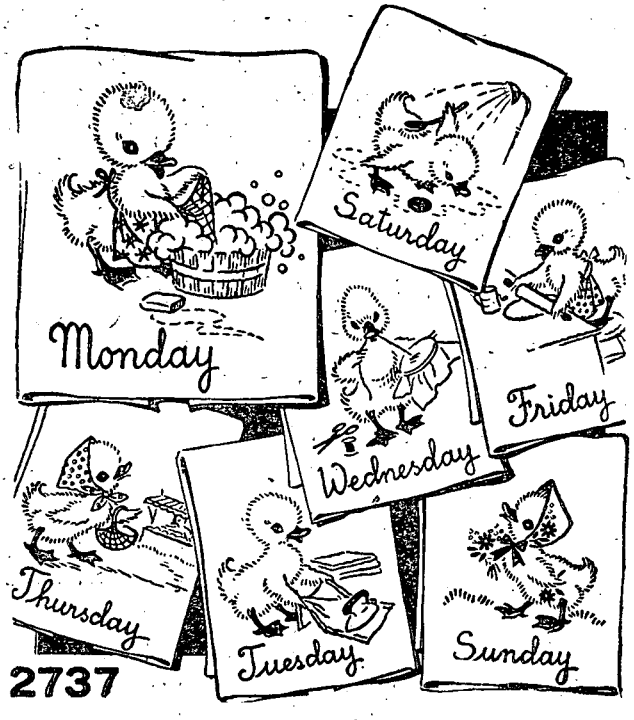




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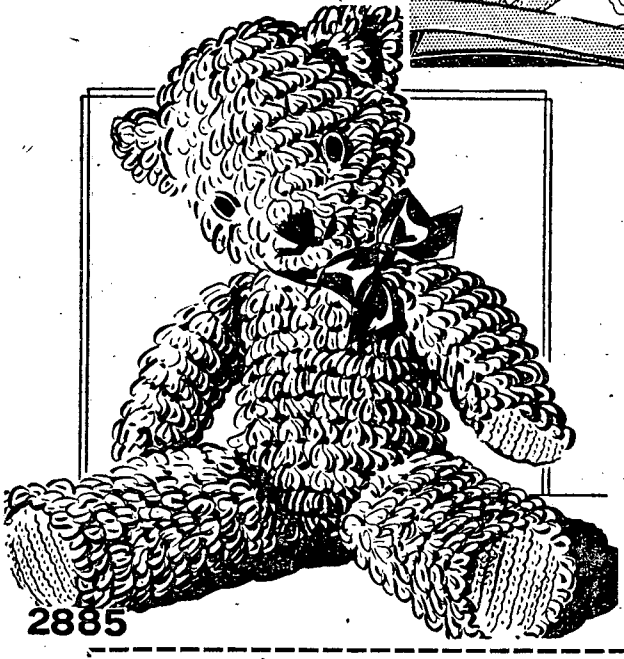


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# A Merry Chase

By MARY CATELLIER

**. . . is not the best exercise for a heart that wants to settle down to love.**

Wasn't it just like a man to tell a girl he liked her because she was "one of the boys," then fall for a girl who was all gold, blue and pink froth. Judy Lund realized vaguely that she had arrived at her first grown-up philosophy of life, and also that she didn't like the way it felt.

There they were out there on Lake Winnebago—Harry and Emma Lou—alone on a sailboat, on a night when the moon and stars were so bright you could read small print. And here she was in the Yacht Club bar with brotherly Don Larson, dancing to a throbbing juke box.

Waiting to hear how Emma Lou and her first tussle with a jib sheet turned out was like waiting for a jury's verdict. Try as she would, Judy couldn't get rid of the conviction something pretty important depended on that jib. If only Emma Lou weren't so unbelievably beautiful.

As the music faded away, Judy looked at her reflection in the mirrored wall. She saw a slim girl in faded jeans and checked, flapping shirt. A plain girl with straight brown hair, big brown eyes and sun-browned complexion. Small freckles marched pertly across a barely perceptible hump in her nose that she had gotten years ago following Harry up a tree, then coming down the quick way.

"I'm not very pretty, am I, Don? Be honest now." Judy held her breath. If Don said she wasn't pretty, she couldn't bear it. She would just die.

He took his time answering. "You're not what I'd call exactly pretty. You're more than that, much more than that. You're . . ."

Swallowing hard, Judy looked away so he wouldn't see the tears that stung her eyes. Why ask when she knew the answer. No one should have to tell her she was the plain type, the type men hiked and sailed with on week days, then left sitting by a mute telephone on Saturday night.

"What I mean is," Don continued doggedly, "you don't have to be pretty to wow the fellows. Look at Cleopatra. Take me for a male example. I'm not what you'd dare call handsome, but the girls go for me. Course I've got money, brains, muscles, and curly red hair."

Judy blew her nose. "Must be catching cold," she choked.

Don led her to a table in the far corner of the bar. "Aw, look kid, you've got this



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*One way or another, Judy knew they had to win this race.*



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thing all wrong. Emma Lou's making a big play for Harry, and he's stringing along for laughs. Harry doesn't go for the frilly type and you know it. Wait until he sees how she stacks up alongside you on a hike . . ."

DON WENT on talking, but Judy didn't hear another word he said. A hike! One of those killer hikes of Harry's, and Emma Lou would slowly disintegrate in front of his bedazzled eyes. That would end his infatuation and send him back to Judy's side where he belonged. Harry liked his girls rugged. That is, he had until Emma Lou descended on Cousin Judy for her first visit north of the Mason-Dixon line. Judy hoped it would be her last one. Emma Lou came loaded down with clothes that made Judy's mouth water. It wasn't that the Lund budget wouldn't bear the strain of expensive dresses. It was Harry.

Under Harry's spell, Judy had accumulated a wardrobe that would have sent Huckleberry Finn into ecstasies. Her vanity dresser was innocent of cosmetics. And that wasn't all. She had learned to sail a boat in spite of a deadly fear of any body of water larger than that found in her own bathtub.

And now! Now, Harry had gone overboard for ultra-feminine Emma Lou. Who was it had said, "Pretty is as pretty does?" Well, it wasn't so. Judy had "done" pretty all her twenty years, while Emma Lou didn't "act" pretty by any measurement. After taking one long look at Harry's photo on Judy's dressing table, she had drawled, "Isn't he simply scrumptious?" and gone to work on him, letting the pieces of Judy's breaking heart fall where they might. Enough was enough. In fact, it was too much. Judy's lips formed into a line, revealing a deep dimple in each cheek. From this minute on, she was going to fight Emma Lou with Emma Lou tactics.

Don waved his fingers in front of Judy's eyes. "Snap out of it. Here they come, hand in hand, eyes blinded by strong moonlight. Ugh! Look at that silly expression on Harry's face."

Judy was looking at Harry, all right, and he was wonderful. Like Don, he wore a T-shirt, blue slacks, sneakers, and a skipper's cap. He had the thickest, blackest hair, the grayest eyes, the broadest shoulders. He was just tall enough so that, by standing on tiptoe, her lips could have met his—if he had been interested. Only he never had.

"Hello, you two honeys." Emma Lou slid gracefully into the chair both Don and Harry held for her. Her yellow hair, cornflower blue eyes, and fireman red mouth made a lovely picture.

"How'd it go?" Judy asked, searching Harry's face for signs of that same shade of fireman red and breathing a sigh when she found none.

Playfully, Harry ruffled her hair. "Pretty fair. Missed you out there, Tomboy."

Grimly Judy thought, I'll just bet you did.

EVERYTHING went scrumptious, simply scrumptious," Emma Lou trilled. "I'm not the least bit afraid of the water now. Harry's such a dear. He declares I'll be a sailor in no time at all."

"In time for the big race on Sunday?" Don ogled her. "Think you'll be good enough to crew by then, honeychile?"

"Oh, Harry! May I?"

"Hey!" Don objected. "I meant for me. On the *Sea Maid.*"

"But I just know I couldn't sail with anyone except Harry," Emma Lou complained. "Besides, honey, you've got Judy."

"I," Judy said emphatically, "have sailed with Harry since we were in high school."

"I think you're mean," Emma Lou said and pouted. "It'll be my only chance to race with Harry because I'm going back to Memphis right after the Regatta. Be-

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sides, I'm your guest. Or don't you northerners believe in hospitality?"

Judy bristled. "Northern hospitality is as good as your Southern brand any day."

"Ye gods!" Harry gazed straight into Judy's narrowed eyes. "Let's not fight the Civil War all over again."

"Leave 'em alone," Don objected. "I'll wager fifty bucks on Judy."

"Shut up, Don," Harry invited. "But that gives me an idea." He fished a quarter out of his pocket. "Heads, Judy crews for me. Tails, it's Emma Lou."

The quarter landed with a metallic thud.

"But Harry . . ." Judy slapped a hand over the coin before anyone could see how it had turned up. "Winning the Regatta means more to you than a silver cup. It means new customers, prestige, business to put The Petersen Boat Company on paying feet. It means you'll be accepted as an authority on boats and sailing by the older clientele. It's your big chance."

"She's right, you know," Don said. "Now with me, it's different. Win or lose, all I have to do is sit back and open dividend checks. But don't get me wrong. I intend to give you plenty of competition." Don's keen blue eyes moved from Harry to a perusal of Emma Lou's white shoulders above her strapless sun dress.

Harry glared at Don. "I didn't know you cared, Don, old *pal*." He swung on Judy. "And you, squirt, are getting too big for your britches. When I need a half-pint manager, I'll let you know."

"You need one now," Judy retorted. "With Emma Lou at that jib, if the slightest thing goes wrong, you won't stand a chance of winning."

"Well I like that," Emma Lou sniffed.

"What a thing to say," Harry said to Judy. "What's come over you? Anyone would think you had a half-interest in my company. Or a sweetheart's interest in me."

Judy jerked her hand from the coin as if it were red hot. Even before she looked, she knew that quarter was on Emma Lou's side. It was.

"Oh, goody!" Emma Lou exclaimed delightedly.

Judy tried to comfort herself. Let Emma Lou sail with Harry in the Regatta. After that, she would be going back to Memphis and it would be just Harry, Don and herself again—The Three Musketeers—with a varied assortment of blondes, brunettes and red-heads for Don.

Beaming, Harry said, "We'll have to get in lots of practice sailing between now and Sunday. Tomorrow . . ."

Quickly, Judy interrupted. "Tomorrow we're going to hike up Howler's Hill and watch the sun rise. It's all planned."

"That hill's strictly for mountain goats," Don moaned.

Judy kicked his shin.

"I'm a mountain goat," Don yelped hastily.

"Say, Judy, that's a swell idea." Harry was enthusiastic. "And how about breakfast on the hilltop? I'll turn the shop over to my assistant and take the morning off. You'll love it, Emma Lou."

Later that evening, Judy baked yeast rolls for the picnic. The way to a man's heart might be through his stomach, and she intended to leave no route uncovered. They looked good so she slept well. And dreamed well, too. In the dream, Emma Lou huffed and puffed up Howler's Hill, as Judy zoomed up its rocky height with the greatest of ease. At the summit, Emma Lou sat exhausted, while Harry folded Judy in his arms—and kissed her. What had happened to Don, meanwhile, wasn't quite clear. He was there somewhere.

Next morning, it required the combined efforts of an insistent alarm clock, plus a persevering Judy, to get Emma Lou out of bed at "this uncivilized hour." Suspense tied Judy in knots as she dressed in the gray dawn and they all rode to the foot of Howler's Hill in Harry's station wagon.

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This wasn't merely a matter of revealing Emma Lou as strictly the indoor type. It was a fight between two girls for the love of a man.

All too well, Judy realized that Emma Lou came equipped with superior weapons. It must be heaven to look into a mirror and see such a lovely reflection gazing back at you. Once, Judy had been quite pleased with her own reflection. That was the time she had ventured to get a permanent and dab on a bit of rouge and lipstick. Harry had thrown a fit. He liked his girls natural, he had yelled. What was natural about Emma Lou's matted lashes and scarlet mouth, Judy asked herself.

"Well, here we are." Singing and whistling at the top of his lungs, Harry unloaded the station wagon. Handing a big thermos of coffee and a couple of blankets to Don, he started off up the hill swinging the large picnic hamper as if it were a toothpick. He thumped his chest. He radiated. "Boy-o-boy! What air! What a morning! Hey, come on. The sun'll get up there before we do. This is the stuff, eh, Emma Lou, old pal."

Attired in a fetching white sun suit, "old pal" seemed inclined to lag behind the others. Protruding from her open sandals were ten crimson-tipped toes. Judy shivered, almost compassionately. Her suggestion of slacks and oxfords had been coolly ignored by Emma Lou. No need to worry about chilling, though. Emma Lou would warm up in a hurry on that hill.

Harry plowed two-thirds of the way up the long hill before he bothered to glance behind him. It was pure golden satisfaction for Judy to watch the slow perplexity settle over his face when he looked just in time to see Emma Lou slip and sit. The rock she landed on must have been sharp, Judy guessed, because Emma Lou jumped to her feet in double time. Scowling, she drew back one sandaled foot and let go at the rock. The next instant she was doubled up, holding battered toes in both hands. Glancing up the hill at Harry, she started to cry.

Judy was sure it wasn't nice of her, but she couldn't help feeling a tiny bit triumphant. Now Harry would see Emma Lou as the hot house plant she was. He would be thoroughly disillusioned. He might even turn his back and walk on.

Shoving the picnic hamper into Judy's amazed hands, Harry practically leaped down the hill to Emma Lou's side. "I'm a big dope," he reproved himself. "I should have realized you're not used to this sort of thing."

Emma Lou sank to the ground. "I'm all tuckered out. Oh, Harry, I can't walk another step. Just leave me here, with a little old cup of coffee, and the three of you go on."

"I told you to wear sensible shoes," Judy snapped. She couldn't help it. The sight of Harry bending over Emma Lou's big toe, estimating the damage, was too much.

Harry turned a delicate purple. "Leave her alone. Can't you see she's hurt."

"Oh, mortally wounded," Judy agreed, matching his shade of purple. "Is there a doctor in the crowd?"

If looks could have killed, Judy would have perished then and there. She almost did anyway because, in front of her suffering eyes, he turned back to Emma Lou and gathered her into his arms. Then, obviously in heaven, he started carrying her up the hill.

Finally Judy couldn't bear the sight of his bliss any longer. If Harry were going in for the clinging vine type, she would try a little of it herself.

"In case anyone should happen to care, this hamper weighs a ton," she remarked loudly, staggering across Harry's path.

Sidestepping to miss her heel, Harry belittled, "Quit your kidding. You've

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sprinted up this hill a dozen times with that hamper."

"Maybe it didn't have her home-baked rolls in it those times," Emma Lou tittered.

"Meow," Don answered Emma Lou. He took the hamper from Judy. "Trade you for these blankets, kid."

Judy relinquished the hamper and took the blankets. As a clinging vine, I'm a sensation, she thought bitterly. But perhaps the rolls would please Harry and make him forget Emma Lou for a moment. He loved yeast rolls.

The sunrise was gorgeous and Emma Lou raved. Busily, she picked a large bouquet of daisies for the center of the picnic cloth, while Judy emptied the hamper. Harry and Don collected wood for a fire, and soon sizzling bacon and eggs were ready.

There was tart, apple jelly to go with the rolls. It was an anxious moment for Judy when the rolls were passed. Biting lustily into one, Harry stopped chewing, looked surprised, then began chewing again. Don performed precisely the same way. Emma Lou took one bite out of her roll, turned up her nose, and tossed the rest to a venturesome bluebird. The bird pecked at it, then flew into a tree top. Judy's heart turned as heavy as the roll in her hand. Even the yeast and the bluebird were on Emma Lou's side.

There were only crumbs and several forlorn yeast rolls when they had finished breakfast. To get her failure out of sight, Judy began repacking the hamper.

Leaning across the cloth, Harry picked up the daisies. "She loves me. She loves me not." He plucked petals from the blossoms. To Judy's relief, it always came out, "She loves me not."

"Those daisies are fibbing," Emma Lou complained, flipping an ant from her white knee. "Get some fresh ones, Harry, honey."

Harry wandered off, picked a huge bouquet and returned to sit so close to Emma Lou that a blade of grass couldn't have squeezed between them. He began all over again.

MEETING Don's eyes, Judy tried to laugh disdainfully. "Know what he looks like doing that?" she asked, loudly enough for Harry to hear. "Ferdinand the Bull, shaggy and ridiculous."

"If it doesn't come out, 'She loves me' pretty soon," Don agreed, "there won't be two daisies left to have little daisies next year."

Harry gave no sign that he heard, and the petals fell like rain.

Finally, Emma Lou murmured, "Bother the daisies, honey." She rested her golden head on Harry's shoulder. "Didn't you ever hear that oldie, 'Daisies won't tell?'"

It was acutely plain to Judy that Emma Lou invited a kiss she didn't get. Could be Ferdinand was shy. Could be Judy's fixed gaze had something to do with that shyness.

Later, as they piled wearily back into the station wagon, Judy admitted the hike had been a dismal failure—from her standpoint. And there was another victory looming for Emma Lou on Saturday night. For surely Judy would offer no competition at the Regatta dance the Yacht Club was giving.

When Harry dropped them at Judy's door, his voice caressed Emma Lou, "Be ready to sail early in the morning. Got to have you in shape for the Regatta."

To Judy, he said politely, "Care to go with us?"

"Thanks," she replied stiffly, "but I'll be busy with a committee meeting for the Saturday night dance."

Harry didn't press the point.

Judy was busy the next day all right, busy watching the *Valkyrie's* white sails from the Lund's front porch. She wished she lived a thousand miles from the lake. Until Emma Lou's arrival, only she had sailed with Harry on that trim little boat.

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It wouldn't seem right racing against him and the *Valkyrie*.

The phone rang. Judy went into the cool library to answer it and found herself staring into the mirror above the phone table. She was beginning to hate mirrors.

"You sound awful!" Don exclaimed. "What's the matter?"

She sighed dismally. "Oh, Don, why do I have to be such a plain jane. Why can't I be glamorous—like Emma Lou?"

For a moment there was silence on the other end of the line. Then he said, "Look, I know a guy. You've heard of Pierre's? He owns that place where you go in a caterpillar and come out a butterfly. In one day's time, Pierre gives you the works—new hairdo, make-up job, everything. He even takes you shopping for clothes to suit your chassis—pardon me—figure."

IT WAS foolish of her Judy knew, but she couldn't help feeling a surge of hope. "But, Don, I don't have an appointment. Could you—do you suppose Pierre would take me before Saturday?"

"Didn't I say I knew the guy? Leave everything to me, sweetie pie. I'll get you in there if I have to buy the joint."

It was absurd to believe in miracles, but it felt so good to dream that Judy fairly floated through dance committee meeting that afternoon. What would her mirror tell her Saturday night? She even went so far as to fabricate the fantasy of Harry swooning at the sight of a creature as beautiful as herself.

Saturday morning Don escorted Judy to Pierre's famous salon. The few days preceding Saturday had been a jumble of hope and fear, of dance preparations, of watching Harry and Emma Lou come and go, always together. One evening—Friday—they went window shopping, and Emma Lou came home telling excitedly of the "simply scrumptious" diamond ring Harry had paused to admire.

Judy and Don hurried to the dance from Pierre's, arriving barely early enough to attend to last-minute dance details. Don didn't seem to be able to keep his eyes off Judy. "I can't get over it," he marveled. "Somebody ought to be arrested for what you've been hiding under baggy britches and flapping shirttails."

Judy pirouetted, causing yards of sheer white material to swirl about her pretty ankles. Truly, this was the happiest moment of her life. The mirrored wall told her she was lovely, from soft brown curls on her head to the soles of her silvered feet. It told her that her full, curved lips were kissable and the sparkle in her big brown eyes said she was ready to be kissed—by the right man. Wait until Harry saw her.

As the orchestra struck up its first number, Judy's heart sang along with it. Several couples wandered in from the veranda and started dancing. It was going to be a wonderful, wonderful evening.

"I can't even finish one dance with my own girl," Don growled an hour later. "My shoulder's been tapped so many times— Oh, oh— here comes another guy with that glint in his eye."

Judy slipped into her new partner's arms. Occupied with the sweet nothings he whispered into her ears, she didn't see Harry and Emma Lou enter. But when the orchestra stopped, they were there staring at her as if they couldn't believe their eyes.

DON HURRIED over to claim Judy back from her partner. "I waved a wand over her," he boasted proudly. "Close your mouth, Harry. And stop drooling."

Emma Lou recovered first. "Why, Judy honey," she purred. "Why didn't you tell me you wanted to spruce up. I'd have been glad to help you."

Judy purred back, "I could have sworn your eyes were blue, *honey*, but so help me, they're the exact shade of that green

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dress you're wearing. I had a cat once with eyes like . . ."

"Girls!" Harry protested, looking deep into Judy's velvety eyes and having trouble finding his way out. Then, his eyes found her mouth and stalled again.

Emma Lou tugged at his sleeve. "Come on, let's dance. That's what we came here for, wasn't it?"

Judy couldn't keep her gaze away from Harry, and he was having similar trouble. It was soon after Emma Lou intercepted one of these mutual glances that she marched him out onto the veranda.

Faint heart never won a man, Judy mentally misquoted to herself. Then, aloud she said, "Excuse me," to her partner, and followed Harry and Emma Lou. It wouldn't be eavesdropping because it was a public veranda, she defended her action to herself. Also, it was public air and she needed some. Besides, her fingers were crossed in case she were fibbing to herself. Very quietly she sat down on a bench behind a potted palm.

A few feet away, Harry and Emma Lou faced the lake, leaning on the balustrade. They seemed to be arguing about something. Judy could catch only an occasional phrase. Emma Lou's voice said, "Let Judy race . . . Sure of winning . . ."

Judy did a slow burn. Sure of winning, was she? Emma Lou was counting her chicks before they were hatched.

Harry's voice answered uncertainly, "I don't know . . ."

Emma Lou's voice spoke again, too low to be heard. And then, slowly, deliberately, her arms wound around Harry's neck. After a long moment, Harry's arms went about Emma Lou.

Judy's world crashed into thousands of little jagged pieces. When Harry went window shopping for diamond rings and kissed a girl like that, it could mean only one thing—wedding bells.

Unnoticed, she crept blindly back to the dance floor. Almost immediately Don found her. "For heaven's sake, you're as white as your dress. You need some air, kid."

"I JUST HAD some," she said. "That's what's the matter. Dance with me, Don. And hold me tight, because if you don't I'm going to fall apart."

A minute later, Harry came up and tapped Don's shoulder. "It's about time I had a dance with the prettiest girl here," he said in an odd voice.

Those were the most beautiful words Judy had ever heard. She repeated them over and over to herself as they danced. The prettiest girl. And Harry had said them. They almost made her forget his kissing Emma Lou. Almost . . .

After a while, Harry said abruptly, "Emma Lou has decided it isn't fair to you for her to race with me tomorrow. Will you take your old job back and crew for me?"

She tried hard to hang on to enough pride to refuse, but found herself saying, "What about Don? He's counting on me to sail with him." Meanwhile, her eyes melted into Harry's.

"I think he's counting on Emma Lou now," he said.

Judy followed Harry's gaze. Don and Emma Lou were dancing together. Something about the smug, satisfied expression on Emma Lou's face made her writhe. She remembered Emma Lou in Harry's arms.

"So Emma Lou suddenly wants to be fair with me, does she? What's she up to now?"

He stared down at her. "Well how do you like that?" he almost yelped. "I guess I owe Emma Lou an apology. She tried to tell me you were jealous . . ." He clamped his mouth shut.

Judy saw red. "Go on, finish saying it. What else did she tell you out there on the veranda? I couldn't hear very well."

He drew in a deep breath. "You eavesdropped! What's happened to you?"

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"*You* happened to me! You and Emma Lou! And I've learned one thing. Pretty is not as pretty does. I'll help you win that old race tomorrow, but only because I'm through with you. You hear? Through with you. Jealous of you and Emma Lou! Me? I hate you so much I can't stand the sight of you."

Pushing out of his arms, she bolted for the veranda. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw Harry start after her. But at the doorway, Don linked his arm through hers. "Emma Lou wants to race with me tomorrow. Says she can't resist my red hair and check book. You won't mind racing with Harry, will you—and how silly of me to ask."

I WON'T MIND—too much." Her voice was almost steady, and only two tears slid down onto her new dress. "It's early, Don, I know. But would you mind taking me home. I—I have a headache."

The next day was sunny, but the wind was strong and gusty, a good wind for capsizing small craft.

Don's *Sea Maid* looked as if she could give plenty of competition. Emma Lou, in white duck slacks, gave plenty of competition to Judy's blue-jeaned slimness.

"All set?" Harry's eyes were as moody as his tone.

"All set, Harry." Just looking at him made Judy's heart thump deafeningly. Such a foolish heart. Hadn't it seen Emma Lou's "good luck" kiss to Harry. Hadn't it heard her say, "You've got to win, honey—one way or another—for us."

The starter's gun exploded jerking her back to reality. There was a race to be won. Maybe Emma Lou could take her man, but she couldn't outsail her.

Later, she began to doubt that statement. Emma Lou handled that jib like a veteran. It was plain her fear of the water was gone—if she had ever had any fear of it.

On the last leg of the course, Don tacked expertly, gained gradually but steadily on the *Valkyrie*, and, suddenly, Harry's mainsail was flapping futilely in the wind.

"That's taking the wind right out of your sails!" Don yelled good naturedly, as the *Sea Maid* surged ahead.

"The race isn't over yet," Harry shouted back at him.

And then pandemonium broke loose on the *Sea Maid*!

Judy looked just in time to see Emma Lou literally fling the jib sheet away from her. She screamed—something about being afraid—but if ever a voice sounded phony, Emma Lou's did.

Forgetting her jib sheet, Judy glanced at Harry to see if he were seeing the same incredible sight she was.

"Man that jib!" Harry snapped. "We're going to win the Regatta."

SOMETHING CLICKED into place in Judy's mind. She started adding, putting incidents and words together: Emma Lou's argument with Harry last night; Emma Lou's unnatural decision to be "fair" to Judy; her saying, "You've got to win, honey—one way or another—for us"; and, finally, her letting go the jib sheet at the climax of the race.

One way or another. It all began to make heartbreaking sense. Emma Lou intended to marry Harry, that was plain enough. For which reason she meant him to win this race, so he would make lots of money to buy lots of diamonds for her fingers, mink for her back.

Harry couldn't be in on such a despicable scheme. He wasn't like that. Yet what else had he argued about and agreed to with Emma Lou last night? And why was he so moody today? There was nothing else Judy could believe, except that it had all been planned, even his calling her, "the prettiest girl."

Her lips tightened. They weren't going to get away with it. She would see to it that Don had an equal chance of winning,

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even if it meant Emma Lou would get her greedy little hands on the trophy. She would do what Emma Lou had done. Then, let the best sailor win.

Timing her action just as a gust of wind hit, she let go the jib sheet.

Shouting several words Judy had never even heard before, Harry miraculously managed to keep the *Valkyrie* from capsizing. She clung to a stay as a big wave slapped the boat. For a brief instant, Harry's eyes met hers, but he didn't seem to see her. She recovered the jib sheet and her composure, but still Harry was lost in thought. Dark thoughts, apparently, because his face was black as a thundercloud.

He was the unhappiest winner Judy had ever seen, and her own face felt as long as his looked. She had helped win a glittering silver trophy and, just as surely, lost love. How could she love a man, yet hate him at the same time?

There was little time for the usual banter and boat talk in the Yacht Club bar. Emma Lou had a train to catch, and Judy didn't intend that she should miss it.

Back at the house, Harry carried Emma Lou's bags out to his car. "Judy, you and Don come to the station with us," he invited. But Emma Lou said quickly, "I've already told both of them good-by, honey."

Harry's face grew longer and blacker, and he slammed the car door unnecessarily hard. Or was that wishful thinking on her part, Judy wondered, as Harry's car turned the corner.

"THANK THE LORD, she's gone," Don said. "Now there'll be peace and quiet around here again."

Judy shook her head. "She'll be back—as Harry's bride."

"Fifty bucks says she won't," Don argued. "Meanwhile, I've some phone calls to make. I'm behind on my blondes and red-heads."

She watched until Don's flaming hair was out of sight, then she walked down to the dock where the sailboats huddled in a silent row, their naked spars barely visible in the twilight. It was quiet on the dock, a good place to take loneliness and heartache. She boarded the *Valkyrie*, caressed its smooth, gleaming deck.

Suddenly she heard familiar footsteps approaching. Judy sprang to her feet, heart pounding.

"When you weren't home, I thought I'd find you here." Harry sounded a trifle sheepish.

"Go away," she commanded in a little voice. "Cheats don't appeal to me."

"Do tell. And look who's talking. Who deliberately let go my jib sheet today?"

"You know why I did that," she accused. "Oh, Harry—how could you do a thing like that?"

"Good heavens, you don't think I had anything to do with what Emma Lou pulled?"

"Then how did you know about it?"

"Same way you did. By putting two and two together after her little act with the jib, plus a confession on the way to the station." He tried to take her in his arms. "I'm glad you evened the score the way you did—darling."

"Don't 'darling' me, you two-timing Romeo. And save your kisses for the girl you're going to marry."

"That's what I'm doing," he said, forcibly pulling her into an iron embrace.

Her heart stuttered wildly and her lips refused to behave. They were getting closer to his every split second.

"It would be nice," she said meekly, "if you'd make up your mind what type girl you want."

"Both types," he answered promptly. "Just like you—a kissable, adorable tomboy one minute, and the prettiest girl in the world the next. And speaking of kisses, last night when I kissed Emma Lou, I saw your lips, felt you in my arms. I knew then that you were the only one for me. Darling . . ."

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# His Sometime Love

By
MARIANNE BARRETT

**Sally denied herself everything for the man she loved, his career—and his fiancée.**

SALLY MARCH did not see the late-afternoon sun as it peeped through the windows of Bill Sherman's home in Hollywood. Neither did she remember, at the moment, that George Graham, producer at Magnum Pictures, had said when he lent her to Bill, "She's the best secretary in the business. I'm doing you a favor."

She only saw Bill sitting at his desk. Poor Bill! Just after he had delivered two smash hits for Magnum, Helen Todd, the chain store heiress, had made a set for him and got herself engaged to him. And his next two stories were resounding flops. A new low!

She noticed his frown now, as he sat staring straight ahead. Three days to the deadline on Bill's comeback, the one last chance that George, because he believed in Bill, had insisted Magnum give him. Three days more, and so far not one convincing love scene in this script of "Ever Thine." It simply had to have love scenes, one after the other, that built to a climax and proved that love was the power and the glory.

"And it is. Just that," Sally said half aloud.

"Take this, Sally," Bill Sherman said.

Instantly she became the perfect secretary. She flipped back a page of her note book, poised her pencil and waited.

Bill said nothing. He ran his fingers through his blond hair and stared wildly around the room.

If this keeps up another minute, I'll shriek, Sally told herself. She didn't dare look at him. She knew what she would see—confused brown eyes and a grim mouth that should be smiling.

Suddenly she had the same urge she had stifled many times before. She wanted to run to Bill and kiss that mouth until it smiled again.

Even the day almost two years ago when Bill, shy, but with that burning look in his eyes, had come into George Graham's office, Sally had looked up from her desk and known almost instantly that Bill was the one and only.

Be yourself, Sally March, she scolded.

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How could he want you when he can have a blonde, glittery girl like Helen Todd?

"How's this, Sally?"

She jumped.

"He takes her in his arms . . ." Bill dictated.

SALLY MADE "pot hooks" and thought, If he's tall and tanned, like you, and wears nice tweed clothes that make a girl dream of firesides and homey evenings, I'd say she was lucky to be in his arms.

Bill continued, "You're beautiful. So blonde and . . ."

"Just as cold as ice," she startled herself by saying.

"What?" He got up from his chair and peered down at her.

"I said," Sally answered weakly, "that she sounded very nice."

He hesitated, turned away, and strode through the French window and on into the sweet-scented garden.

Taking Bill's dictation is becoming just another Marathon, she thought, as she walked after him into the balmy California dusk. "Have you any more thoughts?" she asked, standing beside him under a blooming cherry tree.

A little breeze caught the petals and scattered them on the grass. In the distance, snow-capped mountains were outlined against a blue-black sky.

"That sky is smoky black, like your hair," he said, looking first at the big black storm clouds and then at Sally.

Her heart did a perfect nip-up. Bill was forever saying little things like that, things that meant he was conscious of her, and yet he did nothing about it. Well, why should he? He was engaged to the gorgeous Helen. Maybe it was only her own wishful thinking that made things like that seem to mean something. But it wouldn't be a bad idea to find out. Men had tired of gorgeous girls before, and turned to the comforting ones who were nearest at hand.

Her gray eyes deepened at the thought, and as the tide obeys the pull of the moon, she swayed against him.

"You're a great pal, Sally. More than a pal," he said, and there was a sort of blurred urgency in his voice that must mean something.

Then he put his arm around her! She relaxed against him with a sigh of contentment—the sort of contentment only a girl can know who has loved a man without daring to show it for two long years.

IT WAS a moment that words would have spoiled. His strong arms held her close. Had she deliberately tipped back her head and lifted her lips in invitation? She didn't know, but his lips were on hers. The deep sweetness of his kiss filled her with warmth.

"So little. So soft. Sally, I've wanted to hold you like this for so long."

Now his lips were against her hair. His arms held her as if they were created for her alone. For a long moment she reveled in the joy of his embrace.

Then suddenly a strange sort of revulsion set in. So he had wanted to hold her like this for a long time, had he? And all the while he had been engaged to the gorgeous Helen!

Well, she had practically asked for his kiss. And he was certainly a gallant man. Far be it from him to refuse a girl a kiss when she had practically flung herself into his arms.

Then she wasn't in his arms any longer. Seething with shame, she twisted free and ran through the garden into the house. She was almost sobbing with chagrin and embarrassment as she snatched up her hat, dragged it savagely over her curls and started for the door. She would get out of here and let George send Bill some other secretary. She couldn't face him again after that scene in the garden.

She knew only too well that she didn't mean a thing to him. He had two things on his mind—Helen and "Ever Thine." Sally wasn't either of them. He had kissed her.

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So what? Probably he didn't even know who was in his arms. Probably he was only creating a love scene so he could put it on paper later.

She could hear Bill crossing the living-room. Now he was in the hall behind her, calling her name. The front door would pick this moment to stick!

Intent on escape, she tugged at the door with all her strength. Finally it flew open, and Sally almost lunged headlong against Helen.

For there she stood, one perfectly manicured finger pressing the door bell that Sally was suddenly conscious had been ringing and ringing. Behind her, white shirt front gleaming against conventional black, loomed a man.

BEFORE SALLY could move, the two were inside. The man closed the door and stood leaning carelessly against it, his hat in his hand.

She felt like a mouse in a trap. She must get out! But how, when two people blocked her way, and she seemed to have two wooden feet? She felt Helen's disapproving eyes on her, and wondered if she could tell by her telltale flush that five minutes ago she had been in Bill's arms.

Helen was so lovely. Sally wondered despairingly how Bill could even bother to kiss a girl who had asked for it, when Helen's kisses were his.

"Am I wrong, Bill," Helen asked in her clear, cold voice, "or are we going with Hugh to dinner tonight? After all, he's giving it for us. It's half-past seven now, and you're not even dressed. I telephoned fifteen minutes ago, but your paragon, Jim, said you couldn't be disturbed."

Sally felt the color flood her cheeks. Fifteen minutes ago, she had been in Bill's arms.

Helen continued, "Genius working, I suppose. Well, darling, be sure this script is a knockout so you can take more time to play around. It would be terribly boring to marry a celebrity, if he were too busy to be shown off."

Her voice went on and on. Sally wasn't listening. She was trying to control a smothering rage.

It would be boring to marry a celebrity unless you could show him off, would it? Sally had heard the studio buzz with gossip when Helen caught Bill with her glitter, just when Bill was dizzy with success. She had dragged Bill around, exhibiting him like a pet poodle. And now, when his whole future depended on his making a comeback, she telephoned at all hours, brought people for cocktails and made so many engagements for him that Bill's work didn't have a chance. Bill was trying hard enough, but he wasn't the kind of writer who could turn his thoughts on and off like a faucet. Bill had to feel what he wrote, and Helen kept him too tired to feel anything.

THAT WAS where Sally had first noticed how gallant Bill was. He couldn't say no to a lady. He couldn't even say no to a secretary who threw herself into his arms. Hastily Sally thrust that thought away. Couldn't he see that she was the root of all his trouble? She glanced at Helen resentfully, and then admitted reluctantly that probably no man could see anything but that beauty. To possess Helen, a man might think no price was too great.

She heard Bill say, "Sorry, Helen. Thanks, Hugh, for picking her up and coming for me. Have Jim mix a cocktail. Be with you in a minute."

He started up the stairway, then turned. "Nine tomorrow morning, Sally. By the way, you don't know Sally March, my secretary, do you, Hugh? Sally, Hugh Bently, who owns most of the shoe factories in America."

Sally murmured something that had "glad" and "Bently" in it, met intelligent eyes, and hurried out into the soft, warm night.

Another one, she thought, Another per-

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fectly nice, broad-shouldered male who's goofy about the snow-maiden.

During the following three days, though, if every broad-shouldered male in the world had been goofy about Helen Todd, Sally couldn't have cared. As each hour brought Bill's deadline closer, the hooks and dashes in Sally's notebook became little imps that hopped about and jeered. This script was drivel. No girl in love could talk as Bill was making the heroine talk; and no man who adored her could be so wooden.

Each night, when she staggered home and fell into bed, the tapping of her typewriter rattled through her brain.

But it was over now. "Ever Thine" was on George Graham's desk. Sally had put it there herself, and George said he would read it at once and telephone Bill this evening.

"It better be good, or Bill's through," George barked at Sally. "He's had all the flops a man can stand."

"It's wonderful," she said hurriedly. "Wonderful!" But she couldn't look at him, for she knew she lied.

Now as twilight fell and the setting sun threw long shadows across the garden, Sally sat waiting under the same cherry tree where Bill had kissed her, an extension telephone on a table at her side. George might telephone any minute, and Sally wanted to be near Bill.

He couldn't turn to Helen in his defeat. Helen had no patience with defeat, even when she was the cause of it. Not that Sally expected Bill either to whine or blow up. He would take George's verdict with his lips a tight line and only his eyes would show his suffering. He wouldn't ask for comfort. Not Bill. But maybe—just maybe—it would help a little if she was there for him to turn to.

That morning, when Bill put the script in Sally's brief-case, he said, with a sort of little boy wistfulness that broke her heart into a million pieces:

"Maybe it's better than it seems. Anyway, I'm going to South America as I had planned. I've got to be free to think. I can't seem to do it here."

A lot of thinking he would do if Helen went along on the cruise. But she didn't say it. She couldn't hurt him.

She couldn't stand it. Without meaning to at all, she put her arms about him.

"It'll be all right. It's got to be," she murmured, praying she was right.

"Sally, you're an angel," he said. He hugged her hard, and then turned swiftly away.

Sally had had sense enough to start for the studio then, and leave him alone, but she didn't want to. He seemed so forlorn, so beaten, and he really was good. When a man writes one smash hit, it may be a fluke, but when he writes two in a row, he's got what it takes. Bill certainly had. If only Helen would stop wearing him down with her eternal demands. What man can accomplish creative work if he never has an hour to himself?

When Sally came back from the studio, Bill was not around. She hadn't seen him since she began her vigil at the telephone. Now she sat there, telling herself it would soon be over, and Bill would be gone. At least she wouldn't have to see him every day. Maybe she could forget him if she didn't see him. But she knew she wouldn't. If the whole world separated her from Bill, if he married a hundred Helens, she could never forget him. She was sunk, and she knew it.

Into her reverie came a friendly, warm voice.

"Mind if I join you?" Hugh Bently stood beside her.

"Helen's with Jim, supervising cocktails," he told Sally. "Bill's dressing for the blow-out they're giving for him at The Tropics tonight. The industry surely lays it on when one of its ace writers gets married."

Sally thought, It won't keep up after

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George reads the script and the bad news gets out. Bill will be washed up.

Absentmindedly she said, "Yes, sit down." She rubbed the back of her neck where the muscles seemed tied in knots.

"As tense as that?" Hugh frowned. "You shouldn't take your work so much to heart."

Sally's head snapped up. What did he mean by that?

Before she could ask him, Hugh went on, "You'll have a vacation now. With Bill's script finished, he and Helen can be married at once."

SALLY'S breath caught. "That's something you don't want," she said and amazed herself by saying it.

"No, but to the daughters of big business, shoes are not as glamorous as literary lions." Hugh smiled crookedly. "When I was a ragged boy, I dreamed of riches and a beautiful wife. I have part of the dream. But since I met Helen, just any beautiful wife won't do. Love is a queer thing."

Sally started to agree with him, but as she opened her mouth, George Graham's voice boomed out through the living-room windows.

With a mad rush that sent her chair over backward into a bed of flowers, she flew across the lawn, burst into the room, and stood beside Bill in front of the fireplace.

Great day! George had come himself to tell Bill that "Ever Thine" was a flop!

George stood facing Bill, legs wide apart, face crimson, his voice echoing through the room like a croupy fog-horn.

"So!" he bellowed, waving the script of "Ever Thine" once around his head and slithering it at Bill's feet. "My back is turned. I take one little trip to Bali and two flops you give Magnum. I come back and I beg Ike Bird to give you one more chance. I tell him you're the best Magnum's got. Look at *Apple Blossoms*. It made us three millions. Look at *Tomorrow's Forever*. More millions. What, I ask Ike, are two little turkeys? Give the boy another chance. He'll whip together a super-colossal. More millions. While I was gone, something happened to him."

Sally thought, Helen happened to him.

George took a deep breath, ready to deliver a renewed blast. He stepped forward. Sally slid around in front of Bill, so fierce was the light in George's eyes. Bill put his arm around her and she almost stepped away. Did he think she was begging for his caresses again? Or did he need comfort so badly that any human touch would have helped? Sally didn't move.

"What do I say to you?" George barked at Bill. "I tell you I'm counting on you, don't I? I tell you that you've done it twice, now do it again, don't I? I tell you if it's good, I'll give you what I've given no writer your age. Two screen credits. *Story by William Sherman. Screen play by William Sherman.*"

Sally looked up at Bill, so close, but not touching her now, as if he knew no one could help him. He was pale. His jaw was set so tight that the muscles stood out in his cheeks. In his eyes Sally saw shame, dumb pain, but no anger.

"Dont! Oh, don't!" she whimpered, flinging out her hands to George.

BUT GEORGE GRAHAM wasn't through with him. Taking a deep breath, he shouted, "And what did I do for you? To help you, and because she asks it, I let you have my little Sally. Look at her eyes. Burnt holes. And what do you do? Do you write me a picture? No! A continuity, yes. We could shoot it, but it's a skeleton. No soul. No soul!"

George hesitated. He swung around.

Serene and lovely enough to appease any man's anger, Helen, followed by Jim with a tray of cocktails, entered the room.

George shook his fingers at her. "There! That's what you let me down for. A doll. No brains. Dinners. Dances." He turned

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again, glared, and gave "Ever Thine" a vicious kick. "A bum she makes of you. And you lay me this egg!"

The words echoed and re-echoed as George stamped out of the house and banged the door behind him.

Not one of the four people in the room moved. Not one of them spoke. Sally glanced first at Bill. Then at Helen. Then through the window to where the glowing tip of a cigarette proved that Hugh Bentley still sat where she had left him.

Oh, why did it have to happen? she thought over and over again.

She had known that George would rage when he read the script, but that he would come to deliver his disapproval in person had never entered her mind. It was so much worse than she could have imagined. A thousand times worse.

The silence grew and grew, until it beat in Sally's brain. Darling, she thought. Oh, darling!

Finally, Jim put the cocktails on the table and scuttled out. Bill left the fireplace, walked to the table, and picked up one of them. Sally saw his hand tremble. His voice was firm though, as he said to Helen:

HELEN, I want to apologize for George. He's really very kind. One of the best. But sometimes, he gets excited. Try to forgive him." His eyes met Sally's, then went back to Helen. "But he's right about Sally. I have worked her to death. He's right about me. I sure let him down plenty, and I owe him everything." He raised his glass. "To George. May the next boy he helps not turn out a bum."

This has got to stop, Sally thought. If it doesn't, I'll weep. And it's cheers, not tears, that Bill needs. She touched his arm.

"You're no bum, Bill. You can come back. George said the continuity was right. All the script needs is soul. You can put it in."

Had he been looking at her, he would have seen tears shining in her eyes.

Bill, however, was staring straight ahead. "Loyal to the death, aren't you, Sally? Don't forget it's my third flop. I . . ."

What more he intended to say, Sally never knew. Helen moved definitely away from his arm.

"These post-mortems are intensely interesting, Bill, but it's all so gloomy. I hate gloom. It really looks as if you were through, doesn't it? And your quaint Mr. Graham seems to think I've interrupted a great career."

She took the square-cut emerald from the third finger of her left hand and gave it to Bill.

Sally stared at her. She couldn't mean it. When Bill needed her to give him courage, she couldn't desert him!

Helen evidently could. She took her mink stole from the couch and put it on her shoulders. "When you know what you're going to do, Bill, let me know. I'll be interested, darling."

Bill balanced the ring in the palm of his hand. The emerald caught the flames from the fire. It flashed and glittered with a thousand green lights.

"What am I going to do? I can tell you, Helen." He raised his eyes and looked at her.

Sally thought, Bill loves her so. How can she hurt him?

Bill continued, "I'm going away, Helen. I must find what I've lost and bring it back to the girl I love."

Helen walked out toward the French window. "Of course, if you do that, Bill, things might be the same again. In the meantime, Hugh and I will go on to The Tropics. No sense in all of us missing a beautiful party."

Sally stood still, her lips grim and her eyes filled with disgust, watching Helen drift away. Then she turned back to Bill. He was staring into a cocktail glass with a strange, mirthless smile on his lips. Then he looked at her.

"Sally, you're an angel to stay," he said,

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"but you don't have to. You're due at that party at The Tropics, too, aren't you?"

"Who cares?" she said fiercely. "I'll go if you'd rather be alone, but I think company is what you need. Wouldn't you like to go for a drive? We'll put the top down, and I'll drive, and maybe you can relax. I won't say a word if you don't want me to."

He looked at her a moment, and Sally's heart pounded at what she thought she was reading in his eyes. But he only gave her a little pat on the shoulder and turned away.

"You're tops, Sally," he said, his voice muffled. "Let's drive down by the sea."

It was the strangest night Sally had ever lived through. They drove the night through. Once they found themselves up on Flirtation Point, with the lights of Los Angeles and half a dozen smaller cities spread out beneath them like stars twinkling on a black velvet carpet. Up there, Bill laughed, caught her in his arms and kissed her. It was a quick, gay kiss, and Sally was foolishly sure that Bill thought she was asking for his kisses again. So she hurriedly started the car and got away from there. They were parked by the seashore when the sun, coming up over the mountains, turned the sky to rose and gold.

"You're wonderful, Sally," he said then. "You know how I feel about you, don't you?"

"Yes," Sally said quietly, but her heart was breaking. She knew only too well how he felt about her. A good little pal, that's all she was to him.

TWO DAYS later, Bill left to find what he had lost and bring it back to the girl he loved.

Sally sat in George Graham's office at Mangum Studios, facing George across his huge, mahogany desk, her mind far away to wherever Bill was.

"It's like a little girl you look," George told her.

He was right. She did look like a little girl. A little, lost girl. She sat in a high-backed Queen Anne chair, her feet not touching the floor.

George leaned across the desk and put a hand on one of hers. "That no-good has taken himself off, has he? Now you will come back to me, yes? Once again, I get peace in this office."

Sally smiled. "No, that's what I've come to see you about. I want a vacation."

George scowled.

"Without salary, of course," Sally hurried on. "I want six weeks. Then if you'll have me, I'll come back."

"Vacation! Without salary? You can't have it." He rammed his hand into his pocket, pulled out a fist full of crackling bills, grabbed Sally's purse and stuffed them into it. "Get out," he shouted. "Buy for my little Sally, clothes. Little ermines, maybe. Anyhow, hats with red flowers and birds on them."

She tried to speak, but George waved her away. The dictograph on his desk buzzed. George snapped a button. His cheeks puffed out. "So his foot hurts, does it? Thousands a day he costs me . . ." His voice boomed on and on. Sally put the money on the desk, went out and closed the door softly behind her.

She had not told George where she would spend her vacation, nor that she would not need little ermines, nor hats with birds on them. She hadn't told him, because something he had said was the reason she had given up her room, and was now lugging her suitcase and a big bag of provisions up the path to Bill's empty house.

You're probably crazy, Sally, she said to herself, turning her key in the lock and entering the hall. And you're disobeying Bill. He told you to close the house, have the gas and electricity turned off. Not only that, but you haven't told the milkman to stop the butter and eggs. But George said that "Ever Thine" was constructed right. You've seen many scripts torn apart and put together again. And you love Bill. You know what to do.

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MAYBE, HER mind ran on, here where you can pretend that Bill is yours, where no one can take him away from you, you can put a soul in "Ever Thine," put in all the love words you've longed to hear. And just maybe you might make him George's white-haired boy again. Perhaps, if it will give Bill back his success, you'll be forgiven.

That Bill would give that success to Helen, Sally didn't dare consider.

So day after day, and far into the nights, her fingers flying over the keys of her typewriter, she sat at Bill's desk.

And day after day, night after night, Bill's image came to Sally in that empty house.

With that image so clear in her mind, with her love for him so deep and vivid in her heart, she wove "Ever Thine" into a blazing love story. She was in a garden with the man she loved, where the air was soft and clear, where, close in his arms, his lips were against her smoky-black hair and his voice whispered to her. She could almost hear his words as she wrote them down. Sometimes, it was so vivid she answered aloud. And so all the unspoken words she had dreamed of hearing Bill say, became part of the story she wrote.

The weeks passed. She stopped only to eat, and to catch a little sleep. Her pointed face was colorless. But the burning light in her gray eyes burned brighter.

Finally, as night fell on the last day of Sally's six weeks vacation "Ever Thine" was finished.

The lights in Bill Sherman's living-room blazed overhead, the wood-fire threw yellow flames against the gray stones of the fireplace, but the burning flame that had carried the man and girl to triumph, died in Sally's heart.

Her typewriter gave a final staccato click. She read the title page: *Original Story By William Sherman. Screen Play By William Sherman.* Then, dizzy and almost hysterical with fatigue, she threw her arms on the hard desk and let her head fall forward.

Bill would never be close to her as she had imagined during these past weeks. He didn't love her. Tomorrow, when she took the script and laid it on George's desk, it would be her heart she put there. How could one live on without a heart?

Sobs shook her. She saw the future clearly. The picture would be produced. Bill's name would flash on the screen. "Ever Thine" would be a success, for Sally knew that her work was good. By that time, Bill could do nothing but accept the credit for the script. She would be gone and he would marry Helen. Sally remembered how Bill looked at Helen when he said, "I'm going to find what I have lost and bring it back to the girl I love."

Stop blubbering, Sally commanded herself. What you wanted was a come-back for Bill. Because another girl will share it, is no reason for going dramatic. Life must be lived. Get busy and live it.

She shook the tears from her eyes.

The flames in the fireplace flickered, died, and sprang up again. At last Sally slept, until with a start, she awoke to find the fire dead, and it was another day.

AFTER HER coffee as she put the script into an envelope and dropped it into her brief-case, she glanced at the mirror that hung on the wall beside her. You look like a hag, a bag of bones, she told herself, and took a compact out of her purse. Carefully she painted rosy shadows on her cheeks and applied lipstick to her wan mouth. A little more human, she thought, and hurried out of the house and on to Magnum Studios.

When, after knocking and with more show of courage than she felt, she entered George Graham's office, he was sitting at his desk. A cigar was clamped in the side of his mouth and his face was almost obscured by smoke.

She laid her brief-case on his desk.

George glowered. "So it's Sally, is it? You take a vacation, huh? Three days now

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I telephone. I send boys to your room. Do I get answers? No. That witch where you live, she knows nothing."

"I—didn't leave word where I was," Sally stammered. She opened her briefcase with trembling fingers. "But I've brought you Bill's 'Ever Thine!'"

"What? He sent it to you?" George snatched the script, and stared first at Sally, then at Bill Sherman's name on the title page.

She hurried on, "It is good. I know it's good. With you as producer, Magnum'll have a smash hit. Millions, George, for you and Magnum. And for Bill, two picture credits and a new contract. Read it. Please read it."

The dictograph buzzed. George snapped the switch to still it. Muttering, he turned page after page, his beetling brows drawn together in a sultry frown.

Sally thought her heart would thump itself out of her body. She felt her knees shake, and grabbed the desk for support. He's got to like it. Oh, darling, he must! she thought.

Still reading, George pulled open a drawer of his desk, took out another manuscript, and compared it with "Ever Thine."

Sally's hand went white with the tenseness of her grip. Another script! So George had put some other writer—someone on the lot—on the script. She was too late. Bill was lost!

It can't be as good as mine, she cried to herself. It can't! This means Bill's whole life.

George flipped pages, muttered.

At last, he raised his head. "Sally, you little liar. You cute little liar."

Sally sank into the Queen Anne chair. She had failed. The script was no good. And somehow, George knew Bill hadn't written it.

She got up slowly and started toward the door.

"Sit down," George shouted.


"Hey You SKINNY Bag of Bones!"

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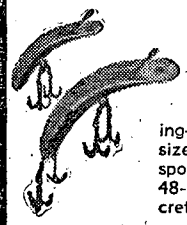

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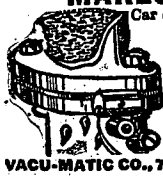

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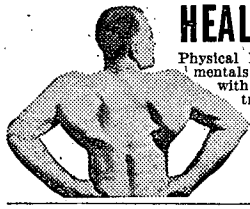

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Sally sat down. George snapped open the dictograph. "Send him in," he ordered.

Someone came into the office. She didn't see who. Her head was bent. Her eyes were shut tight so that the tears might not run down her cheeks.

"Sally!" Her eyes snapped open.

"Where have you been?" a voice asked.

"Bill," she managed to stammer.

"Where have you been?" he repeated.

Sally said slowly, "I took a vacation—in your house."

"Why?" Bill came closer.

Before she could answer, she saw George take up her script and shake it under Bill's nose.

"This is what she does," he said. "I give her a vacation. Does she rest? No. She goes to your house. She takes your lousy script, and a soul she puts in it. *Her* soul, you low-life. And it's good," George continued. "It's colossal. It's super-colossal!"

Into her thoughts came Bill's voice. "Sweet idiot. Sweet, sweet idiot." He reached across George's desk and picked up the second script. "Look, Sally. I didn't go away. I asked George to give me another chance, and to tell no one where I was. I took Jim and got a cabin in Laurel Canyon. I wrote and wrote. Put all the love I had for my girl into it. A week ago I mailed it to George. Three days ago, he wrote me that my script was good, and to come here this morning." Bill paused. "Last night I came to town and went to see Helen . . ."

Under her rouge, Sally felt her face blanch. Of course, Helen!

"It was a kid's act," Bill went on. "But I had to tell her that I wasn't through, that loving you as I did, I couldn't fail. It was when I kissed you, Sally, under the cherry tree, that I first realized that without you, life wouldn't be anything. But I loved you a long time before that."

Here eyes flew to Bill's face.

"Will you have me, Sally? Will you?"



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She couldn't speak. It was too much joy at once.

George Graham was a showman.

"Tell him yes, quick, Sally. Grab a plane for Yuma. Get married today. Tomorrow we start shooting. And the credits! Original story by Sally and William Sherman. Screen Play by Sally and William Sherman. The best writing team Magnum ever had!"

But Sally was in Bill's arms and Bill was saying things that were much more important.

"That night by the sea, Sally," he was saying tenderly, "you were so wonderful. It was bliss beyond belief to know that you understood all the things I couldn't say to you until I had proved myself. We were more like one person than two—one heart, one mind. I felt as if we were thinking the same thoughts."

Things were coming too fast! Sally leaned back against Bill's encircling arms to see what his eyes were saying, while her mind went racing back to that night beside the sea to discover what Bill meant.

All the words she could remember were: You're wonderful, Sally. You know how I feel about you, don't you?

And because she hadn't known at all, she had gone right on breaking her heart! She had thought he was telling her she was a good little pal. And Bill had really been telling her that he loved her! Maybe all those half-shy little things he had been saying to her meant the same thing!

She laughed suddenly, out of the sheer joy of living and loving and being in Bill's arms at last.

"For an author," she said teasingly, "you're far too stingy with sweet words."

"Darling, we don't need words. We know we love each other. I know how I feel about you, and I know you love me, or you wouldn't have stuck around and protected me from Helen." His arms tightened about her in fiercely joyous possession. "Oh, Sally, what a marvelous life we'll have!"


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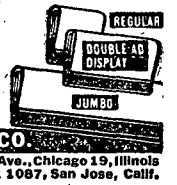


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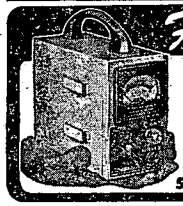

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## LOVE SHORT STORIES

(Continued from page 67)

Later that day, there was placed in Elizabeth's hands a letter he had prepared before departing on the fatal duel. It was a tender, but very simple note:

*This letter, my dear Eliza, will not be delivered to you unless I shall first have terminated my earthly career, to begin, as I humbly hope, from redeeming grace and divine mercy, a happy immortality.*

*If it had been possible for me to avoid the duel, my love for you and my precious children would have been alone a decisive motive. But it was not possible without sacrifices which would have rendered me unworthy of your esteem . . .*

*With my last idea I shall cherish the sweet hope of meeting you in a better world.*

*Adieu, best of wives—best of women. Embrace all my children for me. . . .*

Time passed, and Elizabeth Hamilton became an old, old woman. She survived her husband by many years, survived to see his name become hallowed in the hearts of his countrymen. The light in her eyes, the fierce fire in her breast, were never quenched. She became a great charity worker, a helper of the destitute and the unfortunate.

An acquaintance left a picture of her, as she was as a very old woman. It was Sunday, in the church:

*. . . Our minds and hearts were filled with the good work of this gentle lady when she entered. A very small, upright little figure in deep black, never altered from the time her dark hair was framed in by the widow's cap, until now the hair was as white as the cap.*

*As she moved slowly forward, supported by her daughter, Mrs. Holly, one common feeling made the congregation rise and remain standing until she was seated in her pew at the front. . . .*



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*(Continued from page 8)*

with boys and girls my age or thereabout, especially girls.

Big Boy

**L-4422** KANSAN

I'm a girl of eighteen who would like to hear from friends all over the U. S. I've dark brown hair and brown eyes, am five feet six and a half. I enjoy dancing and also am studying to be a singer. So come on boys and girls, please write soon.

Vi

**L-4423** HE'S SINGLE

A young man twenty-six and single would like to hear from foreign pen pals, male or female. I like all sports, writing letters and most of all I like to travel. I am very lonesome and hope to hear from loads of pen pals soon.

Duke

**L-4424** WORKING GIRL

This eighteen year old working girl is five feet six inches tall and her hair and eyes are brown. My favorite pastimes are swimming, hunting, fishing, basketball, camping and I like to listen to popular music. Would like to hear from boys my age and older.

Jean

**L-4425** FARMER

Forty-one years old, this five foot seven inch single male lives on a farm and would like to hear from ladies thirty to forty years of age. I am quite lonesome when the day's work is done and hope that you will all keep me busy writing letters.

Tommy

**L-4426** OLDER WOMAN

I am a woman thirty seven years old. I work in a hospital and love it, also like to roller skate. I get lonesome and would like to hear from someone around my own age who likes the same things I do.

Gaye


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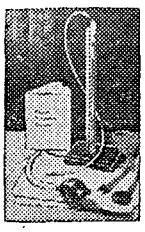

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*(Continued from page 83)*

shouldn't have come. You shouldn't have mixed yourself up in this."

He just held her tighter while he explained his presence. Larry had had the sheriff wire him.

"He got to worrying about you after he was arrested," Nigel said. "The poor devil really loves you."

She lifted her face from his shoulder.

"You've talked to Larry? Then he must have told you . . ."

"Everything a young man should know," he said. "He told me that you are not Lovel Paget and how you happened to be pinch-hitting for her."

"You know me to be an imposter and yet you're here," she said wonderingly.

"Certainly I'm here," he answered. "I flew down as soon as I got Mitchell's telegram. I'd been frantic trying to figure out where you had gone."

She stiffened in his arms, remembering what lay behind her mad flight. "Didn't Glenna tell you . . ." she began.

"Yes. I made her own up how she had sounded off. There was nothing but jealousy behind her tirade. You should have realized that. You had no reason to run out on me."

"No reason?" she cried out of returning bitterness. "You admitted that you had been paid by Miss Carolyn to be nice to me."

"Wait a minute!" Nigel took her by the shoulders and gave her a small shake. "Get this straight. I was paid by Miss Carolyn, but not to be nice to you. I was paid to publicize a niece whom, at the time, I'd never seen. It was a straight job, the first promising job at which I'd had a crack since I set myself up as a publicity man. Naturally, I took pay for my services. That's all."

"Then you weren't paid to . . ."

"To kiss you?" he asked impudently. "No! I felt as if I were cheating on



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Miss Carolyn when I did. As I saw it, I was just an employee. You were her niece and probably her heir."

"And all the time I was only Linda Bailey, a nobody!"

"Thank heaven," he said and pulled her back to him, adding, "That reminds me, I can make love to Linda Bailey with a clear heart, since she's in love with me."

"But, Nigel . . ." She tried to hold him off, fighting not only him but every aching fiber of her slim body. "You can't love a girl who's been using a false name, who's got herself arrested and will be in all the papers. It would ruin you."

He said, "I'll take a chance on ruination with you. And it's not much of a chance at that. You'll get me publicity, even if Mitchell goes to prison, which he may not. Your brother-in-law is with him now, and the two of us are going to work together to get him a suspended sentence if possible."

"Poor Larry." She sighed. "If only you can. He's had his lesson."

He nodded and went on, "That's the end of one of your objections, I trust. Eventually the world will find out that you're not Lovel Paget, but it will strike most of my friends as a huge joke that Miss Carolyn should have brought out a substitute deb."

"Miss Carolyn!" she gasped, stricken afresh. "What's she going to do?"

Nigel said comfortingly, "She'll laugh with the rest of them. The old gal has a swell sense of humor. Anyhow, having brought out a successful debutante, she's already tiring of debs and debuts."

He laughed, and Linda could do nothing but share his laughter. His lips were hovering a breath from hers.

"Kiss me, Love," he whispered against her mouth.

She said, "My name is Linda."

"To me," he told her, "you'll always be Love. My love!"

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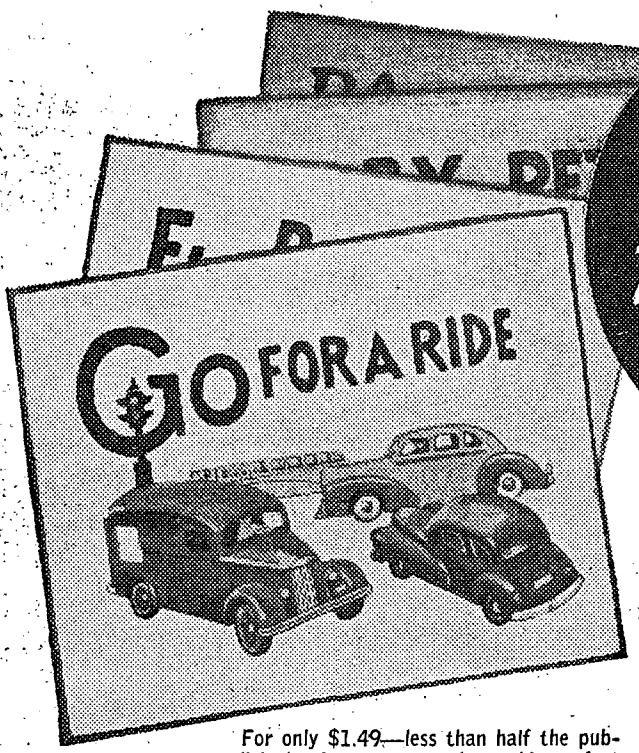


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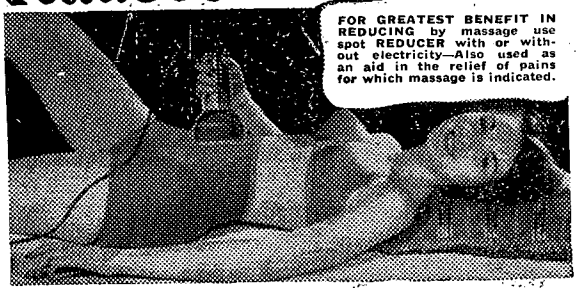

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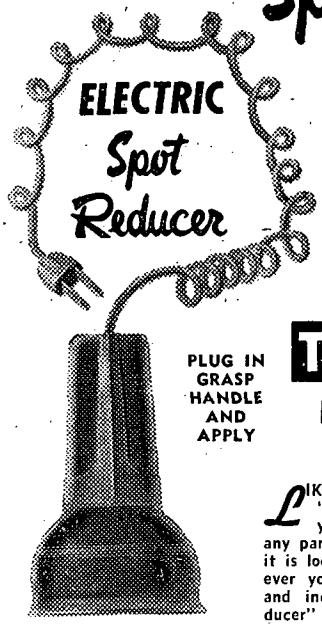


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